NAMAN P. AHUJA

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF ANCIENT INDIA

EARLIEST TIMES TO THE SIXTH CENTURY

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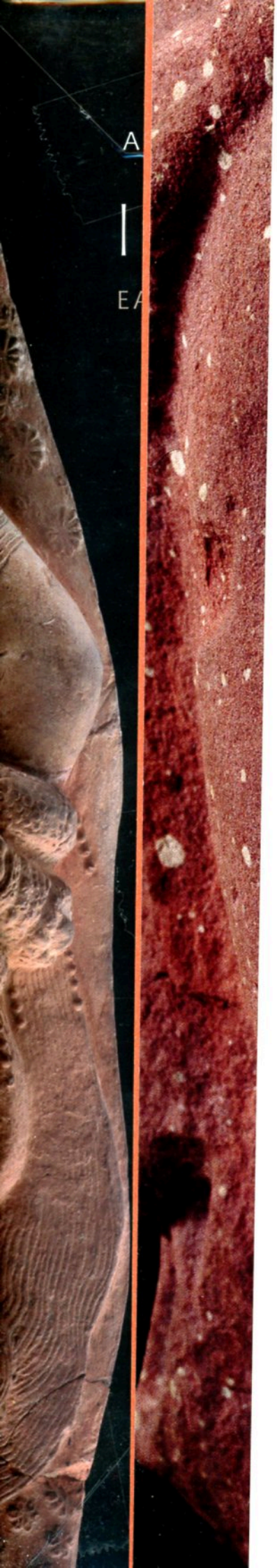
ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM
OXFORD · 2018



In Memoriam
Randolph Leonard Boxall
Marjorie Jean Boxall
(née Walker)

Art and Archaeology of Ancient India: Earliest Times to the Sixth Century
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Naman Ahuja has asserted his moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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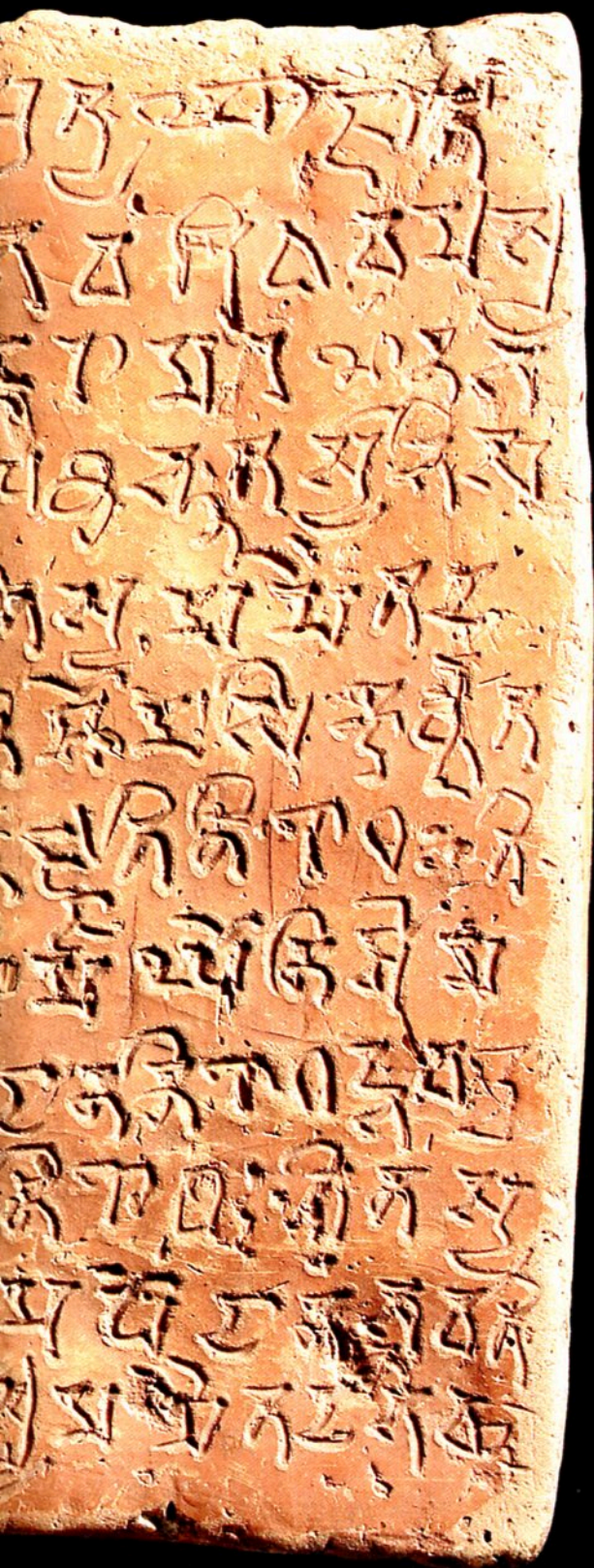


FOREWORD

The Ashmolean Museum is fortunate in having the most comprehensive British collection of the art of the Indian subcontinent outside London. Especially strong in sculpture, this rich representation of Indian art from Prehistory to the twentieth century has come about through the generosity of our benefactors over more than three centuries. The Museum's first major Indian sculpture acquisition, a stone Pala style Vishnu image of the eleventh century, was given in 1686 by Sir William Hedges, a governor of the East India Company in Bengal. From the late nineteenth century, a substantial core of the present collection was assembled at the University's former Indian Institute Museum (1897–1962), precursor of the Department of Eastern Art which opened within the Ashmolean in 1963. Since that date many more Indian objects of all periods have been acquired by gift, bequest or purchase.

Some years ago a project was initiated of cataloguing the Museum's collections of early Indian art up to the sixth century AD, or the end of the Gupta period. These collections are extensive and important but not well known, as only a limited selection can be displayed in our permanent galleries. With the generous support of the Neil Kreitman Foundation, Dr Naman Ahuja joined the Department of Eastern Art as a Research Fellow for two years when the groundwork for the present catalogue was done. This book covers all early Indian objects (pre-AD 600) held by the Department of Eastern Art, with the exception of the Buddhist art of Gandhara, to be treated in a separate catalogue by David Jongeward. Also included here are representative selections from the Indian archaeological holdings of the Museum's Department of Antiquities. The Heberden Coin Room's great collection of early Indian coins has not been included.

We are indebted to Naman Ahuja – now Professor of Indian Art and Architecture at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – for writing a book which will make the Ashmolean's collection much better known to all who study or admire the art of India. We are most grateful also to Neil Kreitman for his invaluable help at all stages of this project.

ALEXANDER STURGIS
Director

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Ashmolean Museum for inviting me to undertake this research, to Neil Kreitman for his initial trust and support and especially to Andrew Topsfield, Curator of Indian Art, for his editorial help, guidance and good humour. I began work on this catalogue at a time when I could still profit from exchanges with Simon Digby and to a lesser extent with James C. Harle, scholars who had served the interests of the Ashmolean's Indian art collections as past curators: I remember them with gratitude also.

In 2002 I was awarded a grant by the Society of South Asian Studies to visit sites in India that had bearing on the material included in this catalogue. I have been able, over the years, to supplement that by several field trips on my own or with my students at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Each of those visits has informed portions of this work.

Alison Petch, Researcher of the ESRC-funded Relational Museum Project at the Pitt Rivers Museum, and Alison Roberts, Collections Manager in the Ashmolean's Department of Antiquities and AHRC British Collections Project Manager, have both helped me wade through provenance histories of what were once collections held within a single department of one museum, but are now scattered among the artefact collections in several different departments and in different museums.

During the initial phases of research on this Catalogue I enjoyed fruitful discussions with Justin Morris, Cameron Petrie, Joe Cribb and Shailendra Bhandare. Alexandra Trone is a paragon of good sense who re-edited the new incarnation of most of this catalogue after a fairly complete manuscript had been lost in 2006. Alessandra Cereda, Collections Manager in the Ashmolean's Department of Eastern Art, has cross-checked all entries and helped to monitor the progress of this book. I thank her and her Eastern Art Study Room colleagues, as well as David Gowers for his photographic work, Robert Dalrymple for designing this book, Catherine Bradley for copy-editing and Declan McCarthy for seeing this book through the press. Amongst my students and research assistants, Avani Sood, Sanjukta Dutta, Anjali Duhan, Michelle de Freese and Shweta Wahi have all assisted me along the way, and I owe them my sincere thanks.

Finally, for their encouragement, help and friendship, I would like to thank Phyllis Granoff, Crispin Branfoot, Robert and Helen Knox, Heather and Robert Elgood, John and Fausta Eskenazi, George Michell, Robert Skelton, John Marr and Parul Dave Mukherji.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Marjorie and Randolph Boxall, two extraordinary people whose generosity, spirit of enquiry and fairness will live with me always.

NPA

PREFACE

This book provides a catalogue of the Ashmolean Museum's important holdings of archaeological artefacts and works of art from the Indian subcontinent in the Prehistoric periods, the Protohistoric or Bronze Ages, and the Early Historic and Ancient periods up to AD 600. It is not a complete record of the Ashmolean's holdings, in that the archaeological material is represented selectively. This catalogue also omits the Museum's large collection of Gandhara Buddhist sculpture and related works under Graeco-Roman influence, which will be discussed in a separate volume by David Jongeward. It does, however, include those terracottas, bronzes and other small finds from the Gandhara region, Central Asia and Kashmir that are part of the wider ancient Indian styles of art which form the main subject of this work. This division of material is in some ways imprecise or problematic. However, these two books together will present a fuller and more comprehensive view of the art of ancient India.

Similarly, no attempt has been made to cover the extensive numismatic holdings of the same period in the Museum's Heberden Coin Room. This catalogue therefore comprises largely Indian artefacts from the Department of Eastern Art, and to a lesser extent the South Asian prehistoric holdings which, for historical reasons, are kept in the Department of Antiquities.

Of this book's six chapters, the first provides a broad overview of the period it covers, from earliest times to the end of the sixth century AD, along with contextual information concerning the religious and social history of the times. Also considered are the ways in which the Ashmolean's collection has been shaped by its donors, the contexts in which their collections were made and the extent to which this has shaped our understanding of India's past.

The second chapter concerns the Pre- and Protohistoric remains of South Asia. Geographically this includes a vast area, extending from Afghanistan in the Northwest to the Northeastern regions and to Tamil Nadu, the southernmost part of the subcontinent. It brings to the fore artefacts from several lesser known sites which are historically important as being among the first major discoveries of India's various Stone and Bronze Ages.

The following three chapters are each specific to one major region: the Northwest (Western Punjab and the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, and adjoining parts of Afghanistan), North and Central India, and Eastern India and the Deccan. Each one covers the period from the third century BC to the end of the sixth century AD, commonly referred to as the Maurya to the immediate post-Gupta periods.

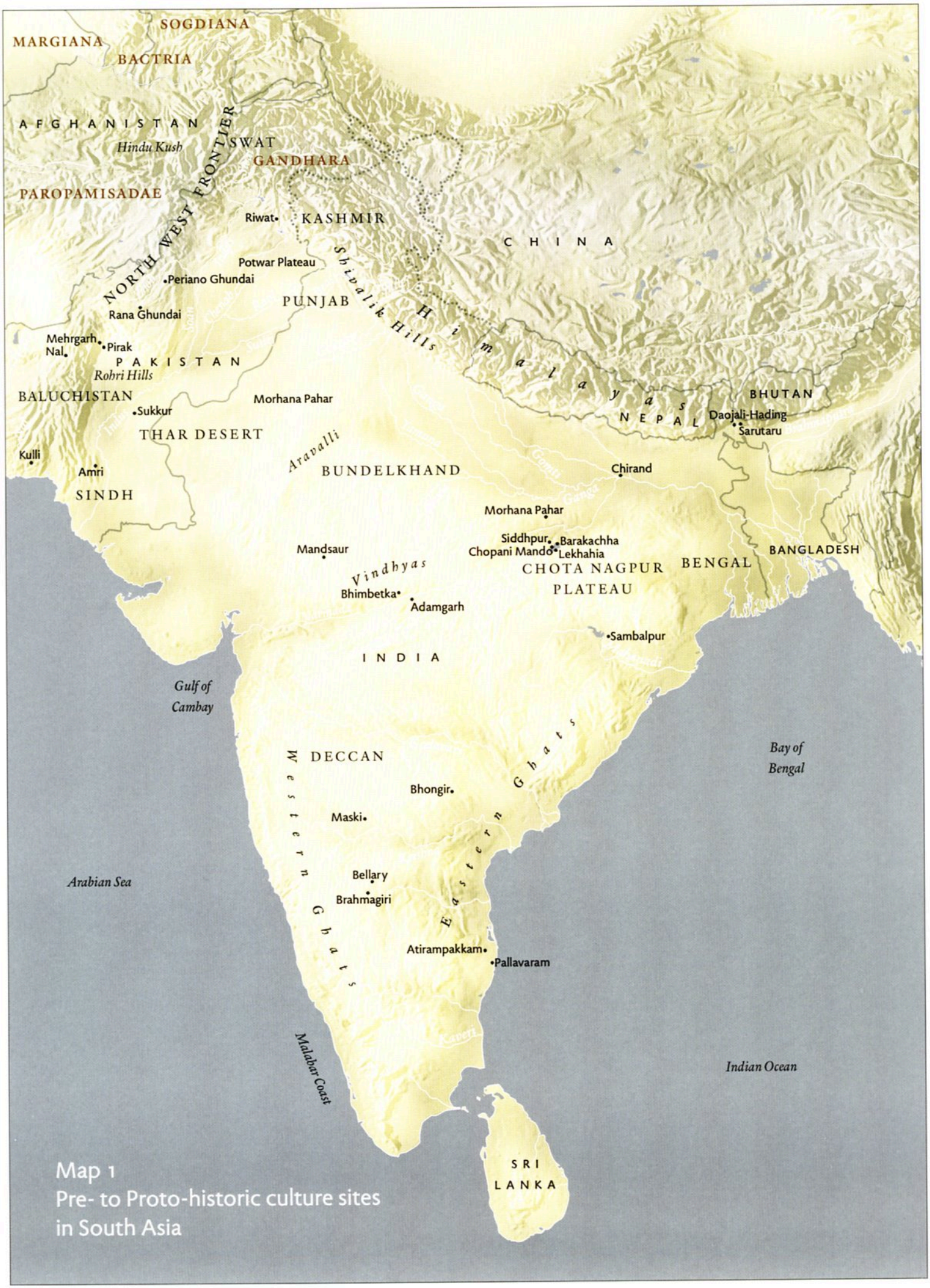
Various curiosities also came to light in the Museum's holdings in the course of writing this catalogue, necessitating a sixth chapter on Miscellanea. Some of these objects are those once thought genuine and now proven to be fakes. Others are in styles known to have been current for hundreds of years, which are therefore difficult to relate chronologically to any of the other chapters. A few more are of types that have been produced at many different places, making it very hard to assign them geographically to one of the previous chapters.

I have attempted to follow a chronological order within each chapter, while at times departing from this in favour of a more visually guided narrative. The aim is to present a history of art and archaeology that builds up a visual history of everyday objects – tools and small finds – along with iconography, religion and ritual.

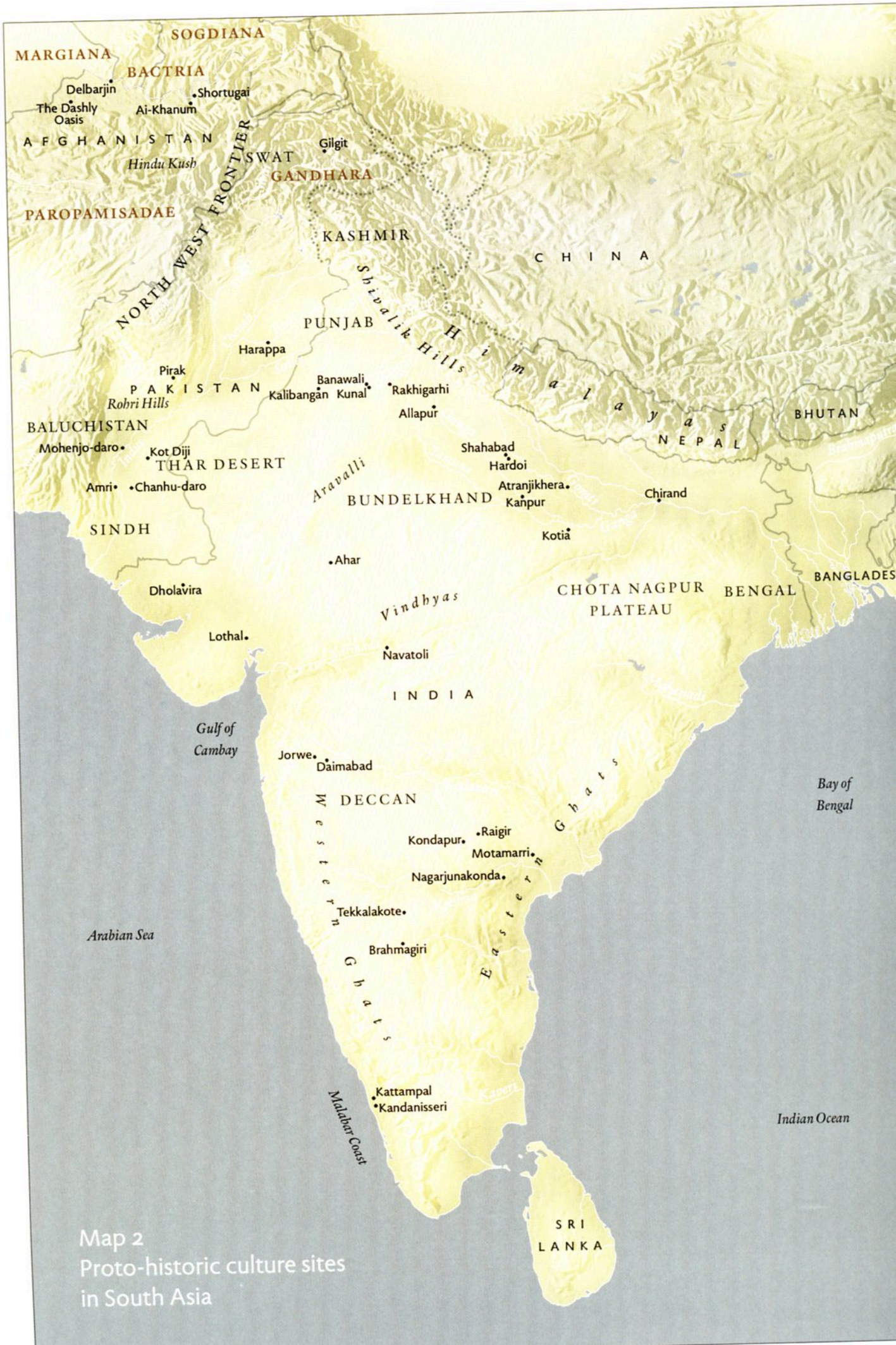
Transliterated Indian language words and names of places, dynasties, deities and iconographic terms are given here in their nearest modern English form and most current spelling – for example, Sanchi rather than Sāñci, Kushan not Kuṣāṇa, *chakra* not *cakra*, Vishnu not Viṣṇu, Shiva rather than Śiva. Diacritical marks are reserved for cases in which specialist scholars will require them, such as full transliterations of texts and inscriptions.

Objects in the Museum's collection included in this book have each been assigned a catalogue number referred to in the text in bold type. Contextual photographs, maps or comparable objects in other collections are assigned a number with the prefix 'fig.'.

Each catalogue entry is usually unique to a particular object. However sometimes, for ease of reading, similar objects are grouped under one broad catalogue number but individually sub-numbered within that entry for purposes of individual description, as in the case of cat. 24, a group of 40 Megalithic Black-and-Red Ware pots. Thus, while this catalogue has 161 entries, it actually deals with in excess of 480 objects, not counting the large assemblages of individual sherds, microliths, Stone Age tools or beads.



Map 1
Pre- to Proto-historic culture sites
in South Asia

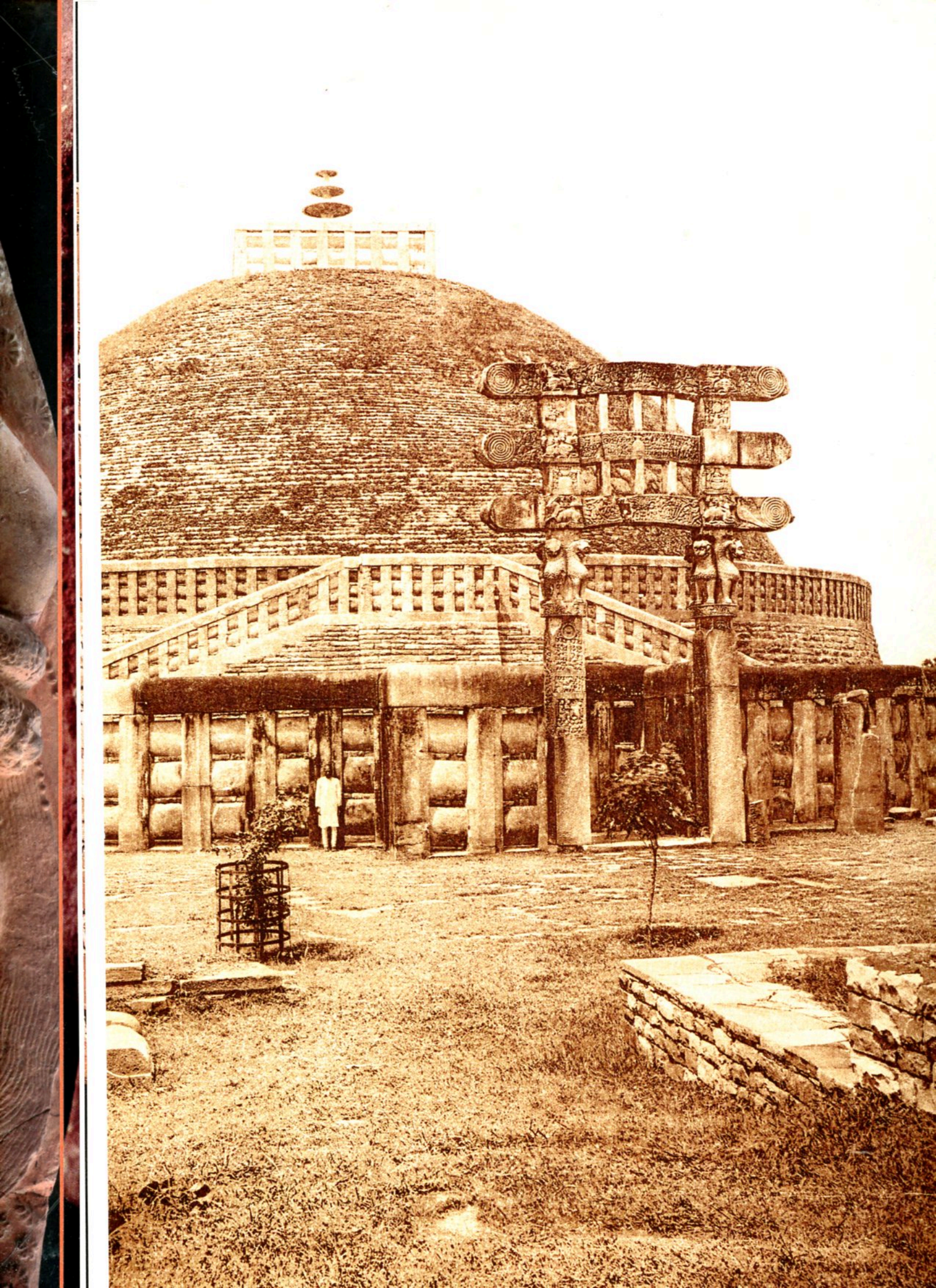


Map 2
Proto-historic culture sites
in South Asia

Map 3
North-western South Asia
c.300 BC–AD 300

CHINA
Sargodha
Shivalik Hills
PUNJAB
Ropar
Sunet
PAKISTAN
Himalayas
Sugh
Kurukshetra
Rangmahal
Delhi
Ahichhatra
Tilaura-Kot
Shravasti
Lumbini
Rampu
Lauriya Nandangarh
Kush
Gopalpur
THAR DESERT
Aravalli
Mathura
Sankissa
BUNDELKHAND
Ayodhya
Buxar
Kaushambi
Sarnath
Bhita
Chunar
Deogarth
Bharhut
CHOTA NA
Eran
Udayagiri
Vidisha
Ujjain
Sanchi
PLATEA
Vindhyas
Ramtek
Phopnar
INDIA
Sopara
DECCAN
Western Ghats
Eastern Ghats

Map 5
Eastern India
and the Deccan
c.300 BC–AD 500



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THE ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF ANCIENT INDIA: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The south side of Stupa 1 at Sanchi in 1920, after its restoration (after Marshall and Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi*, vol. II) detail of fig. 22

A few Indian artefacts already formed part of the Ashmolean Museum's collection at the time of its foundation in 1683.[1] Many more would be added in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Who collected these objects, why and under what circumstances? And what does their collection reveal of the changing knowledge of the history of Indian art and archaeology? Some discussion of these questions is included within individual entries in this catalogue. The purpose of the present chapter, however, is to provide a selective introduction to the cultural geography, social history and religious plurality of India from earliest times until around AD 600, enabling the reader to establish a context in which to place the Museum's Indian collections from these periods.

Any introduction to Indian history and archaeology must consider the lay of the land and its chronology. This chapter will elaborate the five main chronological divisions of ancient India: Prehistory, Protohistory, Early History up to the Mauryas, the Post-Mauryan period and, finally, the rise of the new artistic iconographies and styles under the Kushans and Guptas. The earliest objects in this catalogue could go back to around 1,700,000 BC and belong to the earliest phases of the Indian Palaeolithic Stone Age. Objects that come from the Neolithic period, particularly in Baluchistan and Sindh, date from the sixth millennium BC. They originate in a period of transition from Prehistory to Protohistory, characterised by traces of sedentary life and the domestication of animals. Protohistoric Bronze Age cultures in the northwest and western parts of the subcontinent, such as the Indus Valley Civilisation, were prolific during the period 2500–2000 BC. Perhaps less famous, but equally important Protohistoric cultures were established in other parts of India as well, including a variety of Chalcolithic and Megalithic cultures. These form the concerns of Part II of this chapter. The eighth to sixth centuries BC see the transition to the period called the Early Historic, discussed in Parts III and IV of the present chapter.

Despite the enormity of India's ancient literary and archaeological data, few fixed dates are available in early Indian history. The Buddha, for instance, is believed by most historians to have died around 483 BC. Alexander of Macedon retreated from the Punjab in 326 BC, shortly after which an important dynasty, the Mauryas, occupied most of the subcontinent, reaching the height of their power in the third century BC. Most of the artefacts in this catalogue come from the post-Mauryan period, which may approximately be dated between 200 BC to AD 200. During these centuries the Satavahanas came to prominence in the Deccan, as did the Shungas in Central India and several Indo–Greek kingdoms in the northwest and Punjab. This was, art historically, an extremely diverse and prolific phase, with hundreds of archaeological sites spread all over South Asia. Monuments at these sites have revealed both ancient inscriptions and coins giving the names of dynasties or kings who are also mentioned in literary sources; such valuable information allows art historians to establish the regional and chronological remit of an artistic style. At the same time, particularly with regard to the post-Mauryan period, it remains extremely difficult to arrange in a clear, logical sequence the names of all the kings and dynasties or the rapidly shifting boundaries of their kingdoms. From the second century AD the Kushans came to exert their influence as patrons of art over most of northern India. By the fourth century AD the Gupta dynasty, with its base in Central India, would later lend its name to the artistic style of that period.

Apart from a chronology of ancient India, this chapter also introduces its cultural and religious background. While much of the ancient art of India that has survived is religious in nature – and most accounts of it are, as a result, governed by the telling of a visual history of religion – the arts of the major early religions, Buddhism,

Hinduism and Jainism, cannot in fact be appreciated in isolation without contextualising them within a wider Indian aesthetic world-view. In that context, these religions are seen to be in constant dialogue with each other as well as other cults. Several of them were ridden with factionalism and breakaway sects. Even the more mainstream religions were changing in response to their cultural climate, local geography and social and philosophical needs. It is important, then, to look at Indian art beyond the categorisation imposed by religious terms, such as 'Hindu art' or 'Buddhist art'. Moreover, one of the important aspects of the early archaeological remains preserved at the Ashmolean is that not all are from a religious context; some provide a window into the material culture of ancient India, rather than being manifestations of its later religious cults.

Chapter 2 covers aspects of the earliest artefact remains of South Asia as represented by the Ashmolean's substantial holdings. Some are as early as the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic ages, while others come from periods widely called Protohistoric, Early Historic or even simply Ancient Indian. The Museum possesses objects from nearly every part of South Asia from each of those ages, even as it contains many objects that do not fit neatly into one single category or period. Taken as a whole, the collection offers a narrative of Indian history that is cognisant of the murky interstices between the more celebrated and clearly defined historical periods.

The names given to periods of art history are based, largely, on dynastic appellations. We now realise that these are misleading indicators of the date and spread of an artistic style and are a singularly inappropriate nomenclature for communicating cultural history; however, they remain in common use. The Shungas for instance, were a relatively small, short-lived dynasty. Yet the word has come into common currency to describe the artistic remains of post-Mauryan India. Art historians confront similar problems in the extent and diversity of the Gupta, Kushan or Pala styles, to name only three major epochs. Furthermore, the royal dynasty itself was seldom involved in patronising the arts, especially objects such as terracottas which form the major proportion of the archaeological assemblages covered in this book. The Ashmolean Museum's holdings of Indian antiquities are indeed remarkable for their historical breadth, representing widely varied periods of history as well as traces of the transitions between what are now better documented periods. However, these objects were often collected when the historical epochs of India were hardly known to scholarship, and they have thus played an important role in informing the understanding of India's past.

It becomes equally interesting, then, to look into the histories of the men and women who collected these objects, and to ask what inspired them? This remains

Fig. 1 | Sir John E
(1823–1908)

a subtext of the catalogue that follows. Their personal histories and the circumstances in which they collected objects often reveal both a commitment to research and an insatiable curiosity to know more about the world around them. Some, such as Sir John Lubbock and Augustus Pitt Rivers – inveterate antiquarians seeking scientific credentials for Prehistoric archaeology in Britain (and anywhere else including, of course, British India) – were friends of Sir John Evans, avid Prehistorian and father of Sir Arthur Evans, the famous archaeologist and Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum. Lubbock was a neighbour of Charles Darwin and was married to Augustus Pitt Rivers' daughter Alice. The friends of these influential men were spread all over the British Empire at its height, and through them they amassed formidable collections. A selective account follows of those collectors whose interests lay in the objects covered in the present catalogue. The Ashmolean's collection can tell us much about the sensibilities of antiquarians and connoisseurs of the nineteenth century, as well as what they thought constituted 'fine specimens'. In fact, some artefacts were not merely collected by these individuals because they illuminated 'Indian' history, but also because they are the very objects that shaped scientific research into the grander enterprise of understanding the nature of human evolution. Also, read in another way, they reflect the cultural legacy of the aggrandisement and ambition of the British Empire.

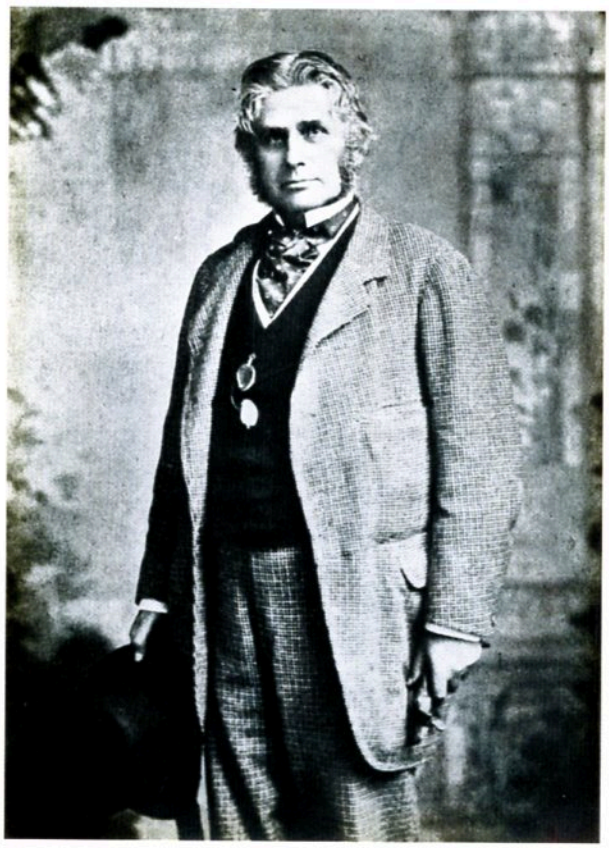


Fig. 2 | Lieutenant-General Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers (1827–1900)

Fig. 3 | John Lubbock, Lord Avebury (1834–1913)

1 · PREHISTORY

Forming the collection and forming our knowledge

Besides the Ashmolean's extensive Indian archaeological collections, mainly housed within the Department of Antiquities, approximately 5,500 archaeological objects from India and Sri Lanka are also held at the University's Pitt Rivers Museum. Most of these are Stone Age tools. The donors of many of the objects at the two Oxford museums are the same, and in fact many of the Ashmolean's Stone Age tools once came from the Pitt Rivers, while a few of those now kept there were originally from the Ashmolean. As a recent study has shown, these Stone Age artefacts began to enter British collections as early as the mid-nineteenth century.[2] The Ashmolean Museum's holdings of Stone Age artefacts from the Indian subcontinent are far larger than can be illustrated here. To avoid repetition, only a few samples of each type have been discussed in this catalogue, with the anticipation that they may whet the appetite of scholars more specialised in these materials than I to discuss them with the comprehensiveness they warrant.

Large collections of prehistoric artefacts were made in the subcontinent by amateur British explorers and archaeologists. Their accompanying reports were largely anecdotal, treating the objects discovered as curiosities that served European antiquarian interests. The 1860s were, after all, the very period when studies on artefacts from European caves, particularly those in the Somme Valley, had prompted publications by John Evans, Hugh Falconer, John Flower, Charles Lyell and Joseph Prestwich, among others, that put forward the view that human civilisation had an antiquity greater than 4004 BC – the date famously proposed by Bishop Ussher for the biblical Creation. Evidence for the Stone Age in South Asia also began to be collected from the mid- to late nineteenth century, first in Central India and the Deccan, followed closely by discoveries from the peninsula and Eastern India. For instance Blanford, in his 1867 'Account of Stone Implements found in Central India',[3] reveals his awareness of the up-to-date research of Henry Christy's monograph of 1865 on the caves and rock shelters of southwest France, and that of 1866 by Edouard Lartet. Not only were artefacts from India part of the shaping of the wider knowledge of the world, the sites where they were being discovered were also at the forefront of defining archaeology as a discipline: they brought to light the relevance of stratigraphy as an archaeological method and geological context in determining the age of artefacts.

Many of the fine and exceptionally large stone blades and cores from Sindh (cat. 10; fig. 4), which can be variously dated to between the late Neolithic and early Indus Valley periods, come from the collection made by John Lubbock, later the first Baron Avebury (1834–1913). Lubbock was among the most significant members of Victorian society and is remembered for his proposals for regulating shop hours and creating Bank Holidays in the British Isles: these one-day public holidays became

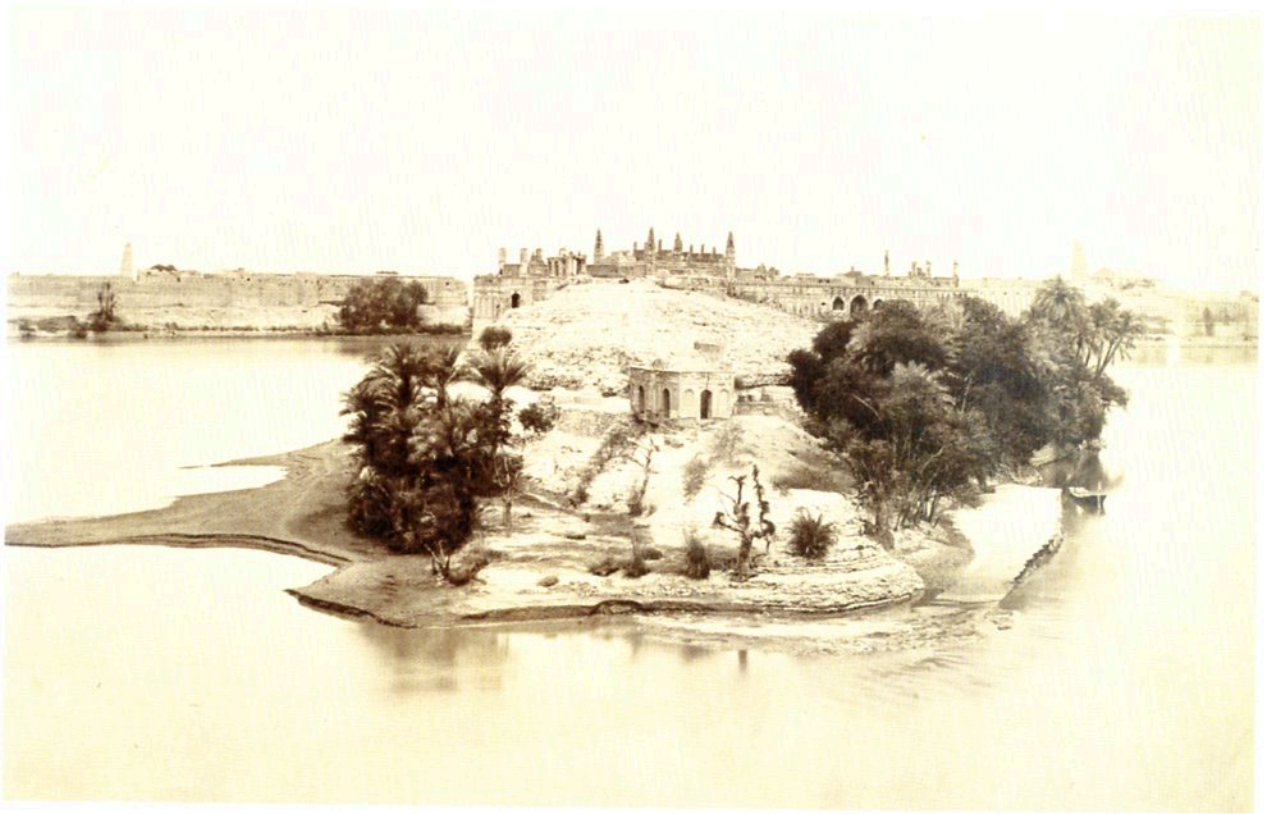


Fig. 4 | The city (Rohri Hill) on t of the Indus, up province (Pakist 1860s

known as St Lubbock's Days.[4] He had been personally tutored by his illustrious father, also Sir John Lubbock, mathematician and owner of Lubbock & Co. Bank, and by their neighbour Charles Darwin. His second wife, Alice A. L. L. Fox Pitt, whom he married in 1884, was the daughter of the archaeologist Augustus Pitt Rivers, founder of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Apart from various scientific societies and clubs, Lubbock was also a member of the famous free-thinking dining club, the 'X Club'.[5] His first major scientific contributions, *Pre-Historic Times as Illustrated by Ancient Remains* (1865) and *The Origins of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (1870), were among the most important works on evolution. In such works Lubbock noted the similarity between the tools of prehistoric man and those in use by 'modern savages' (thus forming the foundations of the discipline of ethno-archaeology), and coined the distinction between Palaeolithic and Neolithic man.

Pitt Rivers's own collection went on to form the basis of his Museum in Oxford. A number of Indian stone tools from the Evans collection (including several that originally came from collectors such as Robert Bruce Foote, J. H. Rivett-Carnac and the Revd. Dr Jarbo) have been transferred at various dates from the Ashmolean to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Many of these collectors also gave pieces to the Geological Museum in London, from where they were transferred to the British Museum. The British Museum also received gifts from these collectors independently.[6]

Another part of the collection is formed by what was initially the collections of Heywood W. Seton-Karr (cats. 1, 3–4). Over 600 objects from the Seton-Karr collection are in the Pitt Rivers Museum, although the larger part of his collection was from Egypt (substantial portions are in the Liverpool Museum, the Field Museum, Chicago and other museums). He served in the army and was an avid traveller, amateur archaeologist and painter. Seton-Karr was also a serious hunter who made about 50 major hunting expeditions, over 20 of them to India. He amassed his collection in the course of his travels in India, Africa and America. While in search of game in Somaliland in 1896, Seton-Karr came across numerous small worked flints which he recognised as resembling Palaeolithic tools previously found in France. He showed examples to John Evans and studied Evans's collections of flints from various parts of the world; on revisiting Somaliland, he recognised many large hand-axes as resembling those from the Somme gravels. These tools, and others from the 'lost flint mines' he had rediscovered in Egypt, were exhibited to the Royal Archaeological Society at their meeting in London on 2 June 1897. Seton-Karr's discoveries in Somaliland were the first evidence of Stone Age man in tropical Africa, and, in Evans's view, tended to prove the unity of races in Asia, Europe and Africa in Palaeolithic times[7] – a view that has, of course, since been improved upon.[8]

The Evans collection was built from those of the earliest archaeologists and travellers interested in non-European Prehistory, including Valentine Ball of the Geological Survey of India and Robert Bruce Foote, who actively collected these artefacts in the vicinity of

Madras (now Chennai) and elsewhere in Tamil Nadu (cat. 1). The larger corpus of Foote's collection lies in the Chennai Museum, while the Ashmolean has a smaller, representative collection of Foote's finds.

An important antiquarian whose objects have indirectly entered the collection is Archibald Campbell Carlyle (1831–97), who published under the surname Carlleyle (cats. 1–2). An enthusiastic amateur prehistorian, he originally came to India to tutor the sons of the Raja of Vizianagaram, but in 1871 went on to work for the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), where he was employed by its director Alexander Cunningham as his assistant. He was subsequently elected a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1880. His large collection of Indian Stone Age artefacts was made traversing on foot, for over 13 years, through Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.[9] Carlyle began to sell off his collection through his neighbour Charles Seidler, curator of the Nantes Museum and an art dealer. It is likely that some of the microliths in the Evans collection (cats. 1–3) may have been purchased from Carlyle through Seidler. However, it is now impossible to differentiate the objects collected by Carlyle from those Evans might have acquired from other sources, since he amalgamated them into typological groups without keeping records of their provenance.

It is thus of some historical significance that the larger proportion of these Stone Age artefacts in the Museum come from the collection of Sir John Evans – not least because these were the very finds that influenced his and his colleagues' opinions on the nature of the Stone Age in world history. And yet, despite the scholarly acknowledgement of these artefacts, the vast collections of them were invariably made by enterprising individuals, often without institutional support or encouragement from the Archaeological or Geological Surveys. As a result the bulk of their findings were inadequately ballasted by contextual information, and served only their antiquarian collecting habits and those of the museums which they shaped. The archaeological value of these artefacts is therefore variable. Some collectors carefully documented the sites that have been the focus of subsequent research, which greatly enhances our knowledge of the objects. Others remain tantalising curiosities.

When was Indian Prehistory?

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the staggering number of artefacts found had begun to change the nature of investigation. The finds encouraged systematic research in the region and put South Asia firmly on the map of Prehistory as a region where some of the earliest traces of human habitation in the world could be explored. Typological studies attempted to relate stone tools to stratigraphically measured chronologies and the geological context from which they were discovered.

Correlating artefacts from sites recorded in the nineteenth century to sites investigated more recently is hindered by our inability to determine, securely, the provenance of the Museum's objects. The collectors did not always specify exactly where an object was found. A tattered label pasted behind an object may preserve the name of a village, but many villages share the same name, and may even be located in the same district. Further, there seems to have been no fixed system of transliterating the names of the little villages in the remotest parts of India. As a result, even collectors who assiduously annotated their pieces use variable spellings inventing their own phonetic transliterations; this can leave us at times with half a dozen or more confusing names which sound the same. Such problems notwithstanding, this remains a large and valuable collection deserving further study. Each type and category of Stone Age tool discussed in this catalogue is only a small proportion of a much larger set, and has been selectively illustrated to reveal the variety and strength of the Museum's holdings.

The Ashmolean's collection moreover allows us to study the complexity of Prehistory in South Asia. The nature and dates of the Prehistoric assemblage varies depending on which part of South Asia one investigates. Although the oldest Palaeolithic material might even be 1.7 million years old at Attirampakkam (one of the sites represented here), the oldest material at the Ashmolean is mostly Middle and Upper Palaeolithic; it cannot therefore be generally dated earlier than 250,000 BC. These ages are contemporary with some other Lower Pleistocene Acheulian sites in Africa and southwest Asia. Tools of the Upper Palaeolithic at one site, however, overlap with the types of the Middle Palaeolithic in another (cats. 1, 3–4); it used to be thought that microliths were distinctive of the Indian Mesolithic Age, however these are now well known even at Neolithic ones and microliths in the Deccan can be studied along with those from Sindh and Bundelkhand (cats. 2, 10); and the variety of Neolithic finds are equally disparate in their geographical find spots and chronology (cat. 5). The Mesolithic tools from one part of India can be as early as 9,000 BC while in others it may be as late as 4,500 BC, coinciding with the dating for sites which were Neolithic in another part of the country.

In this collection we also see stone tools which imitate metallic forms (cats. 3, 5), showing that lithics were used even after the advent of the Bronze Age (usually dated around 3000 BC). Similarly, the many different groups of painted pottery sherds from Sindh, Baluchistan and the Northwest Frontier from the fourth millennium BC (cats. 6–8) also provide evidence of the cultures of those regions in the critical period of transition from the Neolithic to the mature Indus Valley Civilisation, exemplified by the famous sites of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. All this goes into making nearly as rich and seamless a progression to Protohistory as can be postulated in the current state of our knowledge.

II · PROTOHISTORY

As with the dates of Prehistory, so too is there belief in the contemporaneity of the general transition from the Neolithic to the Protohistoric phases of history in different parts of the world. It seems that settled communities with social hierarchies dependent on agriculture – considered the mark of Protohistoric civilisation – developed around the seventh to sixth millennium BC in many parts of the world. One must be cautious, however, as broad generalisations tend to simplify complex phenomena: a number of communities in the world, for instance, have continued to remain nomadic or have lived as hunter-gatherers even when most of the world had become sedentary. Different parts of the subcontinent thus exhibit traces of Pre- and Protohistory at different times. Artefacts from almost every South Asian Protohistoric culture in different regions are represented in the Ashmolean's collection. These artefacts are mostly in the form of tools, burial remains, seals, terracotta figurines and pots (map 1).

Sindh, Punjab and Northwest India

Like Prehistoric artefacts, the fact that an object was collected at a particular site or region does not necessarily mean that it is representative of that place. This catalogue is a document of where many objects were *found*, not where their main area of production was. The complexity of the disparate places in South Asia from where these holdings come, with their overlapping dates and yet their distinctive natures, certainly do not permit any neat telling of history. And herein lies the strength of this collection, for neither history nor its tellers are prone to being neat. Equally, this catalogue reflects where the donors and collectors of these pieces were often stationed or conducted field surveys. Thus the majority of mature Indus Valley sites represented at the Museum are Chanhudaro, Mohenjodaro and Harappa, all extensively surveyed and excavated in the colonial period during the 1920s and 30s, rather than the many sites of earlier and later occupations in the wider ambit of that civilisation which have been unearthed in post-Independence India and Pakistan. Owing to these new discoveries, archaeologists are shifting away from the term Indus Valley Civilisation, as there are now many more sites in Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat along the dried up courses of rivers that fed into the Ghaggar-Hakra, that it is misleading to call it just Indus Valley Culture. Harappan is used as a shorthand (after the celebrated site), or at times, the lengthier Ghaggar-Hakra-Indus Valley Cultures.

Many terracotta pottery sherds (cat. 18) come from the collections of Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) (fig. 5). Stein was employed by the Indian Education Service (1899–1910) and by the Archaeological Department (1910–28). Originally Hungarian, in 1904 he became a British subject. While a Registrar of Punjab University and Principal of Oriental College, Lahore (1888–99), he explored archaeological remains in the Peshawar Valley. Stein was the first to discover evidence of the spread of the Graeco-Buddhist culture of Northwest India across Chinese Turkestan and into China itself. He is most famously remembered for his discoveries at the caves of Dunhuang and for excavating the lost cities of the Silk Road, where he discovered wooden, leather and paper documents, painted wall panels, sculpture, coins, textiles and many domestic objects (now mainly found in the British Library, British Museum and the National Museum, New Delhi).

Similarly, Charles Louis Fabri, another Hungarian scholar who acquired British nationality (in 1939), came to India at the same time as Aurel Stein and made an important study collection for the Indian Institute at Oxford which was transferred to the Ashmolean. Although Fabri had strong interests in Indian archaeology (he accompanied Stein on one of his major reconnaissance visits to Central Asia and held Curatorship of the Lahore Museum), in the years after Partition he became an ardent admirer of Indian dance and sculpture and had a regular column as art and dance critic for *The Statesman* newspaper. These fields took him to a study of costume and architecture. In 1939–40 he put together a collection of small finds, terracotta plaques and sherds as well as some beads, metal and conch shell jewellery and the occasional coin, which included material from Indus Valley sites like Harappa and Mohenjodaro as well as later material from Akhnur near Jammu and Sunet, near Ludhiana in Punjab.[10]

The Ashmolean's is a relatively modest collection of Stein's archaeological sherds. Yet they are a useful

below

Fig. 5 | Sir Mar
Stein, third fro
travelling com
his dog Dash i
Innermost Asia,

opposite top

Fig. 6 | The mai
Mohenjodaro:
in 1929–30 (Ph

opposite below

Fig. 7 | Mohenj
1929–30 excava
the air (Photo:

study collection of a critical period exemplifying both the pre-Indus Valley cultures of the Indo–Iranian borderlands and the late or post-Indus Valley cultures. Prompted by John Marshall's discovery of the ancient civilisation of the Indus Valley, Stein made two journeys through Baluchistan (1927–28) in search of links with the prehistoric civilisation of Sumeria. These were followed in 1932–36 by four other 'archaeological reconnaissances' funded by Harvard University. It is likely that these terracotta sherds were collected either in the 1927–28 mission or between 1932 and 1936.

The extent of the Indus Valley or Harappan Civilisation, it is currently believed, spread from the northwest of the subcontinent in Pakistan to Gujarat, Haryana and the Indian Punjab. Some of its key sites were Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Lothal, Amri, Dholavira, Chanhudaro, Kot Diji and Kalibangan; Mohenjodaro and Harappa were in fact the first mature Bronze Age sites to come to the notice of modern historical study. Over 1,000 sites are now known to us that belong to the extended Indus civilisation, an area appreciably larger than that covered by Early Dynastic Egypt or Sumer. Various proto-Harappan sites have been excavated which show patterns that develop into the Indus Valley culture.[11] When viewing Harappan artefacts, it is now clear that there was no single 'Harappan' culture (unless, of course, the word was narrowly defined to mean only the culture of the people of that city). In fact the term has come to signify the varied cultures of the wider Indus civilisation encompassing Gujarat, Rajasthan and the North Indian plains. The various Harappan cities knew of and traded with each other, and their people migrated within a multicultural whole.

Objects often came to the Museum's collection as curiosities – artefacts intriguing to the scholarly mind. For instance, one of the first Indus seals ever found (cat. 11.4) could not be explained when it turned up in the autumn of 1923 in the excavations at Kish in Iraq, during the Herbert Weld (for the University of Oxford) and Field Museum (Chicago) Expedition to Mesopotamia. Mackay unearthed this seal at Tell Uhaimir, under a pavement built by Hammurapi's son, King Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BC). As it was found in the fill of a foundation, there is good reason to believe that the seal is actually much older than *c.*1700 BC. By 1932 about 30 Indus seals were known to have come from Iraq, mostly dating from the Akkadian period (2354–34 BC). Until the findings from the scientific excavation of Mohenjodaro and Harappa in the 1920s and 30s were disseminated, these seals were curiosities that could not be fully explained within the cultural fabric of ancient Mesopotamia.

First recorded by Charles Masson in 1826,[12] the mounds of Harappa were subsequently visited by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1853 and 1873, but only excavated between 1920 and 1934 by Madho Sarup Vats, and

later by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in 1946. Mohenjodaro (figs. 6–7) was first methodically excavated between 1922 and 1931 by Sir John Marshall and later by Ernest Mackay. After Indian Independence it was excavated again by Wheeler and subsequently by George F. Dales.

The successive periods of the Harappa-style cultures (mature phase: *c.*2550–1900 BC) have left us with a coherent body of art and material culture from a huge area with several major urban centres, many of which appear to be contemporaneous. This is noteworthy, as most other contemporary civilisations in the world were in the nature of city-states where one capital city took pre-eminence. The nature and high degree of town planning and urbanisation show a stratified and organised society with specialised communities. There is also ample evidence of overland and maritime trade with Central Asia, Sumer and Mesopotamia. These urban centres must have been supported by an agricultural surplus produced in the countryside around the towns. Among the material remains are a wide variety of terracotta figurines, beads of precious and semiprecious stone, ivory, terracotta and glass, a few bronze figures and thousands of seals and their impressions (cats. 11–20).

Most Harappan sites are built of baked brick. The cities themselves are remarkably well planned. Large civic structures such as reservoirs, granaries and warehouses have been identified. Residential architecture is invariably in the form of two-storey buildings around a central courtyard. Mohenjodaro is best known for its orderly layout based on a grid plan and its sophisticated drainage system. The site is divided into two parts: a section with the larger public buildings on a higher mound and a lower area for domestic architecture and craft activity. A huge reservoir, or what has been called the 'Great Bath' of Mohenjodaro, measures 11.3 × 6.7 m, with a depth of 2 m at the centre. The cities also seem to have areas with workshops for artisans such as lapidaries, responsible for some rare or unique beads (cat. 15); potters, who made various terracotta vessels, usually red with black painted decoration in distinct shapes (cat. 24); and metal-workers, who worked bronze in various techniques (cat. 8), among others.

A number of motifs and supernatural symbols begin to make repeated and consistent appearances in the seals and terracottas of the extended Harappan civilisation. Strictly speaking, these constitute for art historians of South Asia the first system or language of visual symbols that can be called iconographic. Yet however compelling or widespread this iconography may be, scholarship remains at a loss to understand what it means, and so cannot provide an entirely convincing history of Harappan religion or its cults. It may be argued that an iconography need not always be religious, and the consistent use of a symbol must not make us presume that the Harappans' iconography is a reflection of their cults. All the same, as one sees supernatural representations of plants emerging from vulvas, figures emerging from trees, pregnant females with bovine heads and composite animals, to enumerate only a few instances, these images certainly take us beyond the plausible world of secular iconography.

Apart from Harappan seals, there is great consistency in contemporaneous terracotta figurines. There are appreciably more female figurines than male, and all appear to emphasise their headdresses and ornaments; they tend to have a single stump-shape for legs and can have emphasised hips. Such figurines are often called 'Mother Goddess', a nomenclature that must be adopted with caution. Assemblages of female terracotta figurines from several regions in Pakistan, Northern and Western India may appear to be similar in some respects. Yet we must admit they were too far removed in time or space to be bracketed under some common rubric such as 'Mother Goddess', however many similarities may exist between them to build up a consistent iconography.

Whether the Chalcolithic cultures of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab region or the people buried in the hundreds of so-called 'megalithic' burials of Peninsular India worshiped cultic icons cannot be ascertained. Relatively few stone and bronze figures are known from the Indus sites, and there are none in the collection of the Ashmolean. Terracotta figurines are more common and are of diverse types, and while the Museum does not have any anthropomorphic ones, it does possess a small collection of animal figurines (cat. 14). It also has a small and important collection of seals and sealings, pots, weights and various other minor artefacts from the period. Seals (cat. 11) were probably used in trade, as is evident from two seals in this collection that were found in Iraq. The patterns on the soft steatite stone were carved in intaglio, and then the finished seal was baked to whiten and harden its surface. These tiny seals have presented art historians with some of the most fascinating subjects for study. Usually square, they may at times be in the shape of a long bar, prism (a long bar with three surfaces) or cylinder. They often carry complex intaglio designs, humans, animals and, most importantly, a uniform and developed 'script'. Approximately 400 different signs have been catalogued for this apparently pictographic 'script'. Its successful decipherment, however, eludes scholars.[13]

The art historical continuity between the Harappan culture and the resurgence of urban civilisation in the Ganga Valley in the Early Historic period is broken, owing to the scarcity of material remains from the intervening period in the area. This, along with the discovery of a few skeletal remains that were – rather erroneously – interpreted as a mass grave such as one left in the aftermath of a conflict, led many scholars to suggest that the Indus Valley culture met a dramatic demise at the hands of an Aryan invasion. This is a view to which few

Fig. 8 | Dancing girl, bronze. Mohenjodaro, *c.*2600–1900 BC. H. 11.5 cm. National Museum, New Delhi (photo: Angelo Hornak / Alamy Stock Photo)

scholars now subscribe. Invasion or not, we can at any rate be quite sure that there was growing influence of a Sanskrit-reciting people who called themselves Aryan. On the basis of the linguistic transformations in Sanskrit and the changing geographic features included in texts at different times it is hypothesised that the language group spread in two broad lines of advance: a northern or northwestern branch and a southern branch that came via the Thar Desert. Of the northern branch, one set, it is assumed, settled around Khorasan in Eastern Iran and became the early Avestan Zoroastrians, while those further east became the Vedic Indians. Gradually their influence spread to the plains around the Ganga river. Exactly when this happened, and to what extent it overlapped with the Indus Valley Civilisation, is a matter of serious scholarly controversy.

It seems the Indo-Aryans were semi-nomadic. Their contribution to the material culture and art of ancient India is unknown, as excavations have not revealed any great architectural or sculptural works that can be dated between 1200–500 BC – the intervening period between the sophisticated Harappan urban centres and the artefacts of the earliest cities of the Historical period. Yet ongoing excavations, and those of the past few decades in excavations in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), Haryana and Punjab, hold the promise of altering this imbalance. At any rate, the 'literature' of the Indo–Aryans became one of the most important and enduring influences on Indic civilisation. They are credited with the composition and perpetuation of the four Vedas (collections of knowledge) regarded as the earliest Hindu scriptures: the Rig, Atharva, Sama and Yajur Vedas. These poetic hymns in the Sanskrit language give valuable linguistic, religious, historical and sociological information about the people who recited them. They also provide a foundation for many of the religious concepts that pervade later South Asian art. Embedded within them also are references to the geography of the northern parts of the subcontinent, allowing scholars to locate portions of the texts to these regions.

Central Asia

The Museum holds a solitary example from the Bronze Age cultures of Central Asia (cat. 21). The archaeological monuments of southeastern Uzbekistan and southwestern Tadjikistan are products of the cultural zone that includes parts of Afghanistan and naturally, by extension, had close ties with the Protohistoric cultures of the Indus Valley. There is, however, no reason to believe that this region was inhabited by a homogeneous ethnic or linguistic group. At its northernmost extent lie the Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) cultures, largely discovered and named by the archaeologist Victor Sarianidi. He found numerous monumental structures at many different sites; some are simple nomadic settlements, while others are fortified, with impressive walls and gates. The people interred in the graves associated with these sites are thought to be the first Indo–Aryan-speaking inhabitants of the region. The objects and rituals of these early Indo–Iranians have been identified by some scholars as evidence of the earliest material traces of Zoroastrian and Vedic cultures.[14] The earliest developed stages of this culture can be seen in the Urals and Central Asia around 2100 BC; it reached its peak at sites such as the Dzharkutan temple, Kangurttut settlement and the Tigrovaya necropolis between 1800 and 1300 BC. This Bronze Age

Fig. 9 | E. H. Hunt (
excavating in Telang
Andhra Pradesh (As
Eastern Art Archive

culture of the steppes probably formed the basis of the great Early Historic kingdom of Bactria by the seventh century BC.

Northern India

The Copper Hoard culture is named after the wide range of fascinating hoards of copper objects in the form of weapons, tools and implements which are found scattered across most of India and Pakistan. The most interesting of them, unique in their shapes, come from the Doab, that is, the Ganga and Yamuna river plains. The precise use of such heavy copper objects remains uncertain. Although they are fashioned as weapons and implements, their excessive weight indicates that rather than being utilitarian, they may have been objects for rituals, objects of wealth and exchange or status symbols.[15] A harpoon in the Museum belongs to this phase (cat. 22).

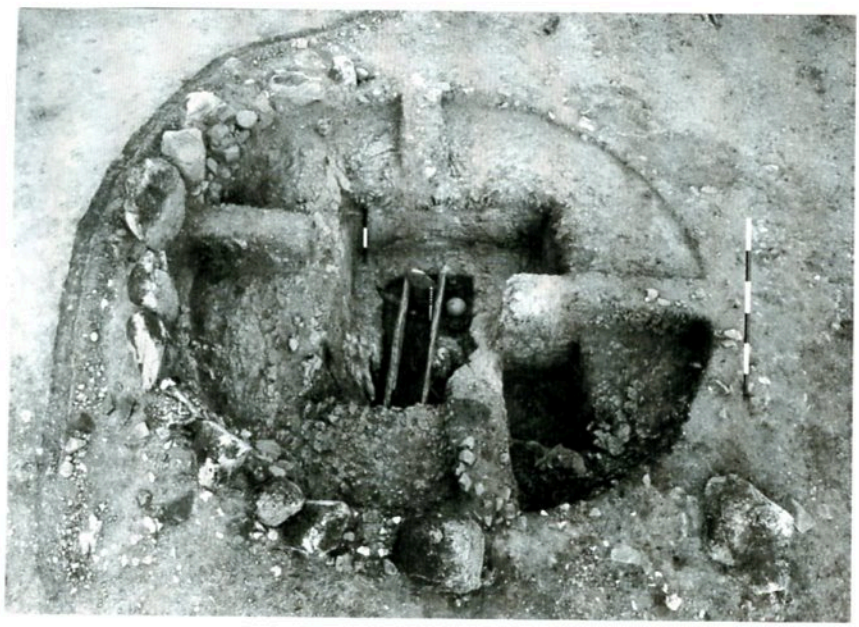
It is generally thought that the Vedic literature must have been composed in the second millennium BC, and a number of scholars have tried, highly speculatively, to relate the Copper Hoard culture to Vedic tribes. It seems that the Copper Hoard culture coexisted with at least the later phases of Harappan culture, although at some sites it appears to have been contemporaneous with Mature Harappan sites as well. Many Copper Hoard sites are found with an associated Ochre Coloured Pottery, usually dated between 2300–1000 BC. It must be noted that even with the aid of comparisons between sites, the rare discovery of a piece in a stratified context and the thermoluminescence testing of associated pottery, enough variations remain in the material to make it difficult to postulate a clear set of dates for this culture. These sites continued until they were replaced by Early Iron Age assemblages, usually characterised by the presence of the distinct Painted Grey Ware.[16]

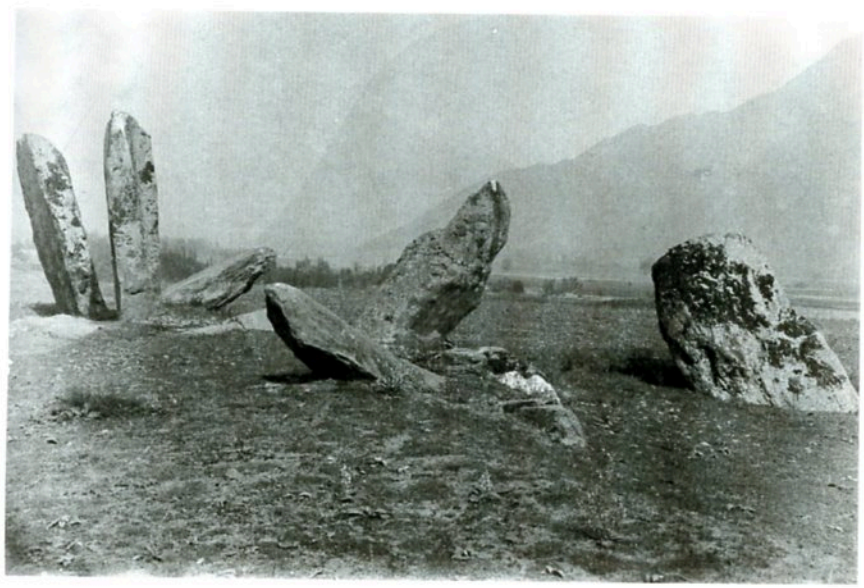
opposite

Fig. 10 | Annapanadi,
terracotta funeral urn
other small pots and
unearthed from an ar
(Photo: ASI)

Fig. 11 | Sector genera
from West showing M
cist and contents of pi
Nagarjunakonda (Pho

Fig. 12 | Harwan, Kash
group of prehistoric m
(Photo: ASI)





The Deccan and Peninsular India

During the past four decades many excavations have been undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Deccan College, Pune at Jorwe, Prakash, Bahal, Nevasa, Daimabad, Chandoli, Sonegaon and Inamgaon. The remains from these sites are divided into four different periods. The earliest phases are Neolithic, which move from the assemblages of larger stone tools to finds of microliths and similar objects. Much has been written about the Stone Age at these sites, their habitation patterns, trade, industry and the extent of interaction between this part of the country and other parts of South Asia at these periods.

The most well-known phases of Protohistory in Maharashtra are the third and fourth phases. Finds from the third phase (second millennium BC) reveal a unique burial culture of excarnated bones in multiple urns. While the Museum does not have any remains of the better-known Jorwe cultures, a large collection of Black-and-Red Ware from the succeeding cultures in that region is available (cats. 24–27). Most of the pots in this collection come from excavations conducted at the sites of Motamari, Raigir and Bhongir in Telangana (a division of Andhra Pradesh) by Dr E. H. Hunt (fig. 9). This Hyderabad State medical officer, like so many others interested in archaeology, was fascinated by the Iron Age Megalithic burials in the area.[17]

The distribution of Iron Age burials in India is wide and spreads over a broad timeframe. The burials have been found as far north as Burzahom in Kashmir (fig. 12),[18] Khandesh / Maharashtra in the northern Deccan and in the hills (such as Kotia in Allahabad district) south of the Ganga Valley. However, the greatest number of burials, and the most varied, come from Southern India. While some of the most remarkable Megalithic complexes have been found in Kerala (for example, Kandanisseri and Kattampal), most are spread over Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and they are especially profuse in the Andhra region. They are understood to be representative of settled Iron Age cultures, variously dated between 1500 and 200 BC.

It is difficult to work out an internal chronology within the Megalithic clusters, as many different types seem to occur simultaneously and in the same place. Not all the Megalithic complexes have revealed ossuaries (figs. 10–11). Of those that do, some appear to consist of chambers that contain single skeletons, while other complexes have chambers containing multiple skeletons. Sometimes remains are interred in urns or large terra-cotta troughs with multiple legs. Often the grave contains iron implements such as tools, weapons, pots, stands and tripods, as well as etched carnelian and other stone beads and, rarely, objects in such metals as bronze, copper and gold. Almost always, however, the distinctive Black-and-Red Ware is present. Presumably these grave goods were intended for use in the afterlife.

III · EARLY HISTORY UP TO THE MAURYAN PERIOD

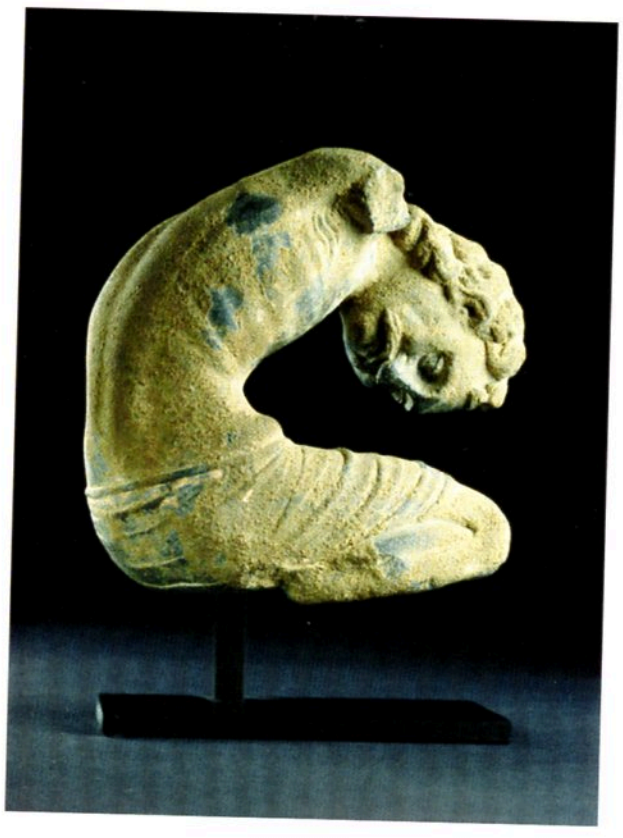
In the south the Black-and-Red Ware, dated between 600 to 100 BC, marks a transition to the historical period where Megalithic burial culture continued. The sites show large rock-cut circular enclosures, which had in their midst pottery sarcophagi containing human bones. These represent quite huge and remarkable feats of activity.[19] Megalithic burials are also known in the north, but they are not as well preserved. Interesting correlations can be made between the ancient art of burying both cremated and skeletal remains in megalithic enclosures and the plans and ideas that underlie the building of early Indian stupas (Buddhist relic shrines), to which we shall turn presently. That South India had certainly moved into the historical age by the late centuries BC is attested by surviving inscriptional evidence from the period of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka, as well as the Sangam literature, the earliest body of Dravidian literature in Tamil. Broadly contemporaneous with the region's prosperous trade with Egypt, Arabia and the Mediterranean in the first century BC and early centuries AD, it is said that three successive assemblies were held at Madurai where the poets and bards of the south came together. The collections of their work are gathered under the general term of Sangam.[20]

Significant sites emerged in the north around the sixth century BC, and these were to remain centres of habitation, power and trade for millennia. The period is particularly marked in the east with the use of iron and the prevalence in Northern India of a type of ceramic called Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW). The process of state formation was already well on its way by this time, with large parts of the subcontinent divided either into various *janapadas* (small monarchies) or *sabhas* (small confederacies or collectives of tribes, castes and / or communities with elected representatives). In their early years these were highly ritualistic societies, with the king placed at the apex of the empire as a *chakravartin*, or universal divine monarch. Some of the prominent monarchies were Magadha, centred on modern Patna; Vanga, encompassing modern Bengal; Kashi, around modern Varanasi; Gandhara in the northwest; and Vatsya, with its capital at Kaushambi near modern Allahabad (maps **2–4**).

During this period increasing amounts of forestlands and their resident peoples were put to agricultural uses, fostering the growth of urban centres, artisanal classes and trade. The manipulation of natural resources within each geographical unit generated a rich surplus – be it access to iron and coal from Eastern India or gold panned from Himalayan rivers and mined in Karnataka and Andhra, the settlement of agricultural communities across the expanse of the Indian plains or trade in precious and semi-precious stones, including sapphire, coral, diamond and agate, as well as perfumes and ivory. This in turn fostered major artistic and architectural projects and furnished guilds with raw materials. Centres such as Taxila in the northwest, Mathura and Kaushambi in U.P., Rajgir, Gaya and Pataliputra in Bihar, Chandraketugarh and Tamralipti in Bengal, Dharanikota and Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh and Vidisha in Central India were among the more prominent sites that have revealed the types of objects found in the Ashmolean's collection. The chief remains at these sites will be discussed presently.

The Development of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism

With the rise of sedentary life, the Vedic establishment of the caste system's four-fold division of society into the Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra classes served as a persuasive model that gradually began to assert itself. Although not at first seeking to be discriminatory, this socio-economic division separated people by their broad professional calling, placing the educated priests (the Brahmans) and the warriors and rulers (the Kshatriyas) at the top of the scale. Vaishyas, the merchants and traders, were followed by artisans and workers, the Shudras. In time, inter-caste social mobility became restricted – a development accompanied by the growth of ritualism. Kings and priestly classes were reliant on elaborate rituals to ballast their status and maintain social order. The rituals that marked personal rites of passage also served to enhance people's social status.



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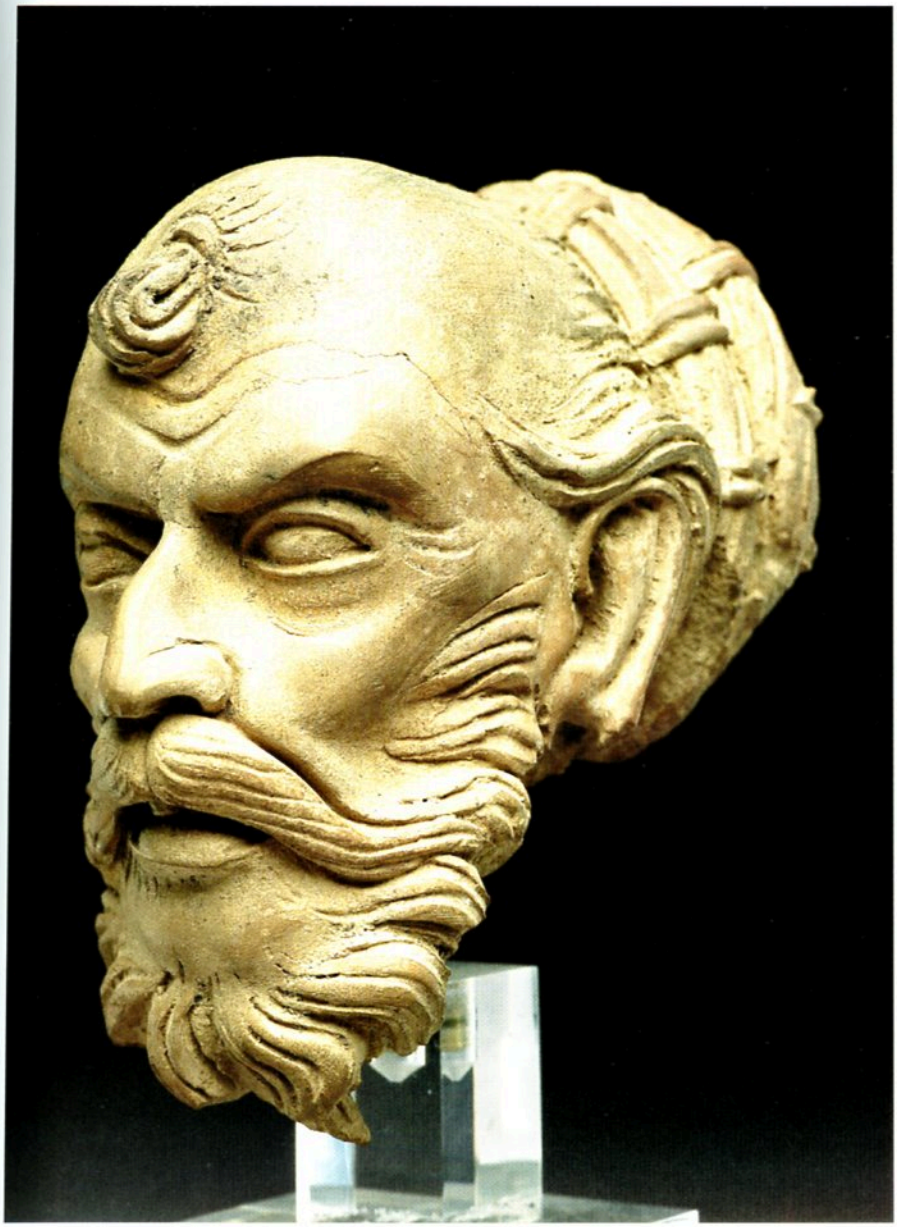

It seems that in their rise these ideas were not accepted without some commentary, challenge and conflict. The admittance of many other autochthonous cults, and an appreciation of this changing and varied philosophical milieu, are of significance for art historians trying to understand the multifarious types of cult icons that emerged in the second century BC. It is unfortunate that so little material evidence has survived from the period between 600–300 BC, when there was an important interaction between different strands of traditions – urban and tribal, indigenous and Indo-European – which merged to create the fabric of Indian civilisation.

Some evidence for this is preserved in early Sanskrit literature, which does not remain static. New deities take prominence by the Later Vedic age, and words that appear to come from the Dravidian language form a part of the literature from the earliest time, indicating that the tradition was open to change. Even though the earliest Indian texts, the Vedas, contain vivid descriptions of the gods, they do not explicitly sanction image worship. Various other bodies of religious literature continued to be composed in Sanskrit until the twelfth to fourteenth centuries AD. Although there is no easy way of dating many of these texts, it seems that embedded within them lies evidence for developing at least a relative chronology of ideas. This has to be done with caution, as sometimes a late text may preserve records of an older pantheon of gods, magico-religious worship, spirits and shamanistic possession, medicine, rituals and drama which may significantly enhance our appreciation of art objects from an earlier period.[21] Texts that have been useful in illuminating the mythologies and nature of various deities include the two longest epics in the world, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, as well as the later *Puranas*. These texts have survived into the modern period in both written and oral versions.

Literary sources, oral or written, and both Indian (Sanskrit or Pali) and Greek, attest the presence of a rich tradition of philosophical debate. As an increasing number of peoples were incorporated into wider organised trade and agricultural networks, their various shamanistic cults, wandering ascetics or *shramanas* and local theistic pantheons contrasted with the existing Vedic liturgy. Sometime in the fifth century BC Siddhartha (later Gautama Buddha), a prince of the northeastern state of the Shakyas and the founder of Buddhism, came from this tradition of heterodox sects. So too did Vardhamana Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. Monarchs and merchants patronised these religions and richly endowed the ascetic orders. Although there are few artistic remains of this early period (most sculptures and buildings having been made in perishable materials such as wood), the early heterodox sects and other theistic cults perpetuated the sanctity of sites associated with their seers and myths. These sites consequently became major centres of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain pilgrimage, trade and artistic activity.

As has been mentioned, it is within this growing context of renunciation and asceticism (figs. 13–14) that the rise of various heterodox sects, including Buddhism and Jainism, is to be viewed. The latter was popularised by Vardhamana Mahavira, last in a line of 24 Tirthankaras (literally: 'ford-maker') who rose to the status of Jina (someone who has attained 'victory' over this material world). Mahavira is said to have lived between *c.*540–468 BC and may have been contemporary, for part of his life, with Gautama Buddha, believed to have lived between *c.*563–483 BC.[22] There was much in common between these faiths and between their founders: both were members of the Kshatriya caste, opposed to Brahmanical orthodoxy, who denied the authority of the Vedas and were opposed to ritualism, including animal sacrifices which had become a keystone of Brahmanical power. Their doctrines were marked by extreme non-violence, and both gained popular support by virtue of being

non-caste faiths. At the same time, being favoured by the most influential kings, they gained imperial patronage, which greatly helped in disseminating their teachings.[23]

Christianity too may have arrived at a very early date; some believe it was brought by St Thomas soon after the death of Christ. Syrian Christians have certainly lived in Southern India from the ancient period, and their presence in the northwest and in Afghanistan is also believed to be very early. Although the Persian Zoroastrians did not migrate to India until the medieval period, long-standing ties with Iran over millennia ensured their faith was well known. Indeed, art historical research now corroborates no small amount of Zoroastrian influence in the statuary of the Northwest Frontier and Afghanistan.[24]

A careful reading of the philosophical and religious literature of ancient India thus reveals a continuous process of development, in which no one religious system appeared without reference to the others and none was at any time static, fully formed or complete. The land was always producing new cults and gurus, as much as it was constantly reinterpreting older ones and absorbing various tribal forms of worship.[25]

The coming of Mauryan art

Leaving aside these cultural and religious digressions, we may revert to our broad historical narrative. The mountain passes of the Northwest Frontier have always been India's vital corridors for links to the West – whether for overland trade or, as in the case of Alexander (Sikandar) in the third century BC, for conquest (fig.15). The northwest had been developing closer ties with Persia from the sixth century BC onward. The prosperous region of Gandhara formed the twentieth Satrapy or tribute-paying province of the Achaemenid empire. This Persian dominance began to decline with the settling of the Bactrian Greeks in the region after Alexander of Macedon defeated Darius, the Achaemenid emperor. Yet Alexander's war-weary army retreated from the Jhelum river in 326 BC, probably because they were unwilling to face the standing army of the Nanda kings of North India, and his possessions in Sindh, Punjab and Afghanistan were divided between his generals. The establishment of the first subcontinent-wide empire of the Mauryas in the third century BC, with its base in Magadha in modern Bihar, came therefore at a time when aspiring monarchs had already a centuries-old model of statecraft and control over a standing army on which to base their administration.

The ancient kingdom of Magadha saw rapid changes in its monarchy until the king Mahapadma initiated the Nanda dynasty. Though they were equally short-lived, the Nanda are often referred to as the first empire-builders of India. Chandragupta Maurya sought his opportunity to seize power within the cracks in their state. His illustrious dynasty assumed official power in 321 BC and founded the capital of Pataliputra, from where the Mauryas ruled. The reign of Chandragupta Maurya saw a rapid expansion of the empire, particularly northwest of Pataliputra. According to Jain accounts, he was a devout follower of their faith, who in his declining years underwent rigorous self-mortification in accordance with Jain tradition. Most famous of the Mauryan kings was Ashoka (reigned *c.*273–32 BC) who helped to make Buddhism into a proselytising religion. Most of the spectacular Mauryan pillar capitals, rock-cut caves and the brick cores of important Buddhist stupas are credited to his reign, although none of the forms of these creations were necessarily invented at that time.[26]

The Mauryan is a controversial period in art history. Nearly all the literature on it is concerned with the debate on the indigenous versus foreign (Achaemenid, West Asian, Hellenistic) origins of Mauryan art. The artistic expression of the period may seem to have no immediate precedent in India, but its symbolism, to which we shall return, seems to uphold time-honoured Indian concepts, unique in the ancient world. The most striking feature is the sophisticated and profuse use of stone as a medium for sculpture – a material which, as inscriptions reveal, was consciously used with a view to posterity. This means that whereas remarkable Mauryan art remains in stone have survived, very little of the traditions of wood, ivory, precious metal and other perishable or recyclable material that would have also been made at that time, and indeed in prior centuries, is now available to us. The great pillars and some of the sculptures bear a characteristic glossy polish called the Mauryan High Polish, which some scholars say was never seen before or after the Mauryas. Some also say that the artistic style died with the decline in the dynasty, assuming therefore that it was mostly a 'court' art. Yet it did influence succeeding cultures, particularly in the realm of terracottas and the absorption of its Achaemenid-style motifs into the decorative repertoire of Buddhist stupas.

It is possible to postulate a slightly different sort of history, however, if one focuses on the small terracottas and the occasional ivory or wood image from the Mauryan period, instead of the overwhelming body of stone sculpture. More modest in scale, but equally preserving iconographic conventions that were more prolific and widespread, the little terracottas would have been objects used by people in their homes, perhaps for rituals or as ex-voto offerings. They wrest history away from the elite discourse based on public monuments that required either imperial or collective patronage and communal effort to produce, and permit a more quotidian telling of art history. The remarkable affinity between these small Mauryan terracottas, from sites as distant as the Northwest Frontier and Bengal, shows the nature of urban networks already in place in the subcontinent by this period. There are several small-finds of

Fig. 15 | The Alexa
Tourmaline seals
portrait of Alexan
Great, 325–300 BC
impression show
Ashmolean Muse
(AN1892.1499)

the Mauryan and immediately post-Mauryan period in the Ashmolean. Although making a chronological distinction between them on stylistic grounds alone is sometimes hard, it is possible, nonetheless, to show that art from the Mauryan period had a definite bearing on subsequent ages.

Ashoka is mentioned extensively in ancient Buddhist literature, and he is known to have strengthened diplomatic and trade exchanges with Iran, Greece, Egypt, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. He is known to us also from the numerous royal inscriptions left by him on pillars and rocks. These give us insight into a variety of social, religious and economic matters, as well as his statecraft and promotion of an ethical code of tolerance. Imperial Mauryan freestanding monolithic pillars were all quarried at Chunar and then transported over river networks to far-flung regions of the empire. They also preserve two of the earliest readable Indian scripts, Brahmi and Kharoshthi (cat. 76).[27]

The pillars (figs. 16–17) are highly symbolic monuments, and though they may be largely present at important early Buddhist sites, they bear imagery which resonates with all the ancient religions of India: the lotus (transcendence and purity), tree (ancient spirits), chakra (the wheel, movement, cyclical time and a discus-shaped weapon), serpent (regeneration, water and the earth, bearer of treasure); bull (virility, strength); elephant (knowledge, remover of obstacles) and lion (power). Thus, despite the undisputed awareness of Achaemenid art in India at the time, it is impossible to view the art and architectural remains of the Mauryan period without reference to the symbolism of Indian religious iconography.

IV · THE POST-MAURYAN PERIOD

A much weakened Mauryan state saw a revolt in 183 BC when Pushyamitra, perhaps a Brahmin general of the Mauryas, seized power and founded his own kingdom. Other kingdoms also emerged at roughly the same time, and we meet with names of several different dynasties such as the Andhra / Satavahana, Mitra, Kuninda,

Fig. 16 | The Mauryan pillar at Lauriya Nandangarh, Champaran, Bihar, 3rd century BC. Sandstone, H. *c.*12 m above ground. (Photo: ASI)

Fig. 17 | Lion capital from Sarnath, 3rd century BC. Sandstone, H. 214 cm. Sarnath Site Museum

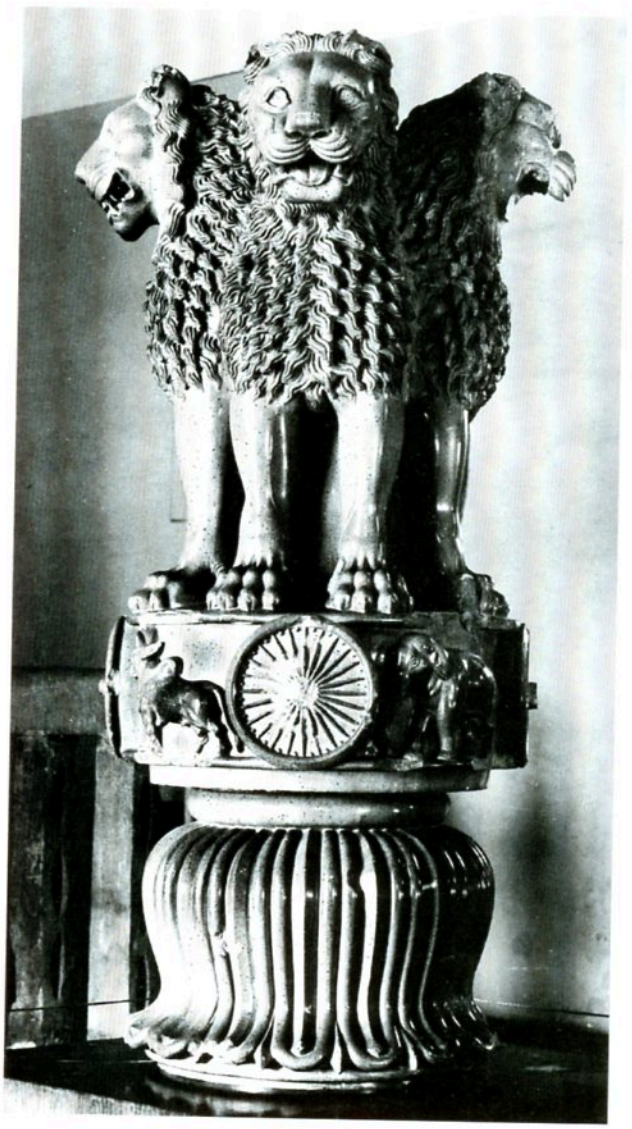

Fig 18. Stucco statues
the face of the main s
Mora Moradu, Taxila
photographed 1915-1
(Alkazi Collection)

Audambara, Yaudheya and Datta, to name only some of the more prominent. The immediate Post-Mauryan period saw the decline of empire and the rise of a series of relatively short-lived states that wielded power over smaller regions. To label the entire post-Mauryan period 'Shunga' is thus a misleading art historical convenience, found in most textbooks.

In the third and second centuries BC Kaushambi, Ayodhya, Sarnath/ Kashi, Sankissa, Bodh Gaya, Pataliputra, Chandraketugarh and Tamluk were major towns in the northeastern regions; Mathura, Sugh, Ahichhatra, Sanghol, Ropar, Sargodha and Semthan were some of the major towns of the north; Taxila, Begram, Ai Khanum, Peshawar and Bannu were settled in the northwest and Afghanistan; Vidisha, Bharhut and Ujjain were important centres in Central India, and Amaravati and at least 20 other major stupa sites in Andhra; besides Paithan, Ter, the rock-cut caves of Western India at Nasik, Junnar, Bedsa, Karla, Kanheri and Bhaja in Maharashtra... the list is enormous. This is significant, as these are the sites from where much of the material culture for the period addressed in this catalogue comes. Here they are grouped into four regions, which are outlined below.

The Northwest

Objects from the northwestern parts of the subcontinent are covered in Chapter 3 (map **2**). The region attracted settlers and travellers despite its climatically arduous and difficult terrain, and the local populations lived off either overland trade or small-time agriculture. Politically speaking, various Central Asian tribes began to threaten the Indo–Greek kingdoms that had been present in the region from the third century BC. One of these tribes, the Yueh Chi, which had been invading Western China regularly, found raids into China were becoming harder by the second century BC. They had also grown more sedentary, and their own pasturelands began to be exhausted. As a result they looked westward, to Bactria. Having chased the Scythians from their empire, the Yueh Chi retained control of the region for a while before following them into Gandhara. The Shakas (as the Scythians were called in India) ended the reign of the last Indo–Greek king in the region, to enjoy power only briefly until the first half of the first century AD, when the Yueh Chi chief, Kujula Kadphises, initiated the period of the Kushans in India.

Once again, large areas of the northern parts of the subcontinent were closely linked to developments in Central Asia during the first to the fourth centuries AD. The Kushan empire's control over the Silk Road was aided by the links between their twin capitals at Pushkalavati, modern Peshawar, in Gandhara and Mathura in Northern India. Each region engendered a prolific centre of artistic activity.

The province of Gandhara (encompassing north-eastern Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier of Pakistan), with its prominent cities at Pushkalavati / Purushapura (modern Peshawar) and Taxila, had become part of the northern section of the Kushan empire by the first century AD. The region had long been exposed to various cultural influences introduced by its neighbours: dominant among them were the Indian cults of various Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, animistic Central Asian and Scythian nomads, Iranian Zoroastrians and migrating Greeks from Bactria. As a direct result of absorbing these multicultural strains, the ancient region of Gandhara produced some of the finest statuary in world art in the hybrid artistic style named after the region from which it derives.

Although largely Hellenistic or Roman, and to a lesser extent Central Asian, in inspiration and expression, the distinctive sculptural art of Gandhara was primarily Indian in its content. Large Buddhist stupas, sculpted at first in locally found grey schist and later in stucco, were covered with narratives from the Buddha's life and the *Jatakas* (birth stories) that monks carried with them from their Indian stupas and monasteries. The Gandhara region's material remains faithfully express the hybrid and eclectic nature of its geographical position at the crossroads of Asia.[28] There is considerable stylistic variety within the region, depending on which site and period a sculpture comes from. Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan is the most representative site of the more Hellenistic-styled images from the ancient kingdom of Bactria from the third to second centuries BC, while the environs of Jalalabad had some of the finest sculptures in stucco from the third to fourth centuries AD. The Peshawar and Swat Valleys were prolific in Buddhist sites from where sculptures have been avidly collected for the past 150 years (figs. 18–19).

The Ashmolean's substantial holdings of the Buddhist art of Gandhara are published in a separate catalogue by David Jongeward. Chapter 3 of the present catalogue therefore documents only those objects from Gandhara which relate, stylistically and iconographically, more closely to objects from mainland India. These include images of various Hindu deities, the many types of *yakshis* and *yakshas*, small terracottas and metal objects which remained important at a personal level (cats. 28–68).

Akra, the mound at Bannu from where a number of objects in this catalogue come (cats. 31, 44, 51), is perhaps the archaeological site with the longest history of habitation in the Northwest Frontier. It is certainly one of the most closely studied, and reveals patterns of habitation that are older and distinct from later sites. The lower levels of excavations at Taxila have revealed Mauryan terracotta artefacts, made in a style akin

Fig. 19 | Massed group of Gandhara Buddha and Bodhisattva images collected at Loriyan Tangai, Peshawar District. Photo: Alexander E. Caddy, 1896 (Warburg Institute, London)

to Mathura (cat. 28). Sar Dheri and the environs of Peshawar also have distinct types of terracotta figurines with a consistent iconography of mostly feminine figures that do not show any Buddhist affiliation (cat. 29).

North and Central India

Objects from Mathura and Kaushambi in Uttar Pradesh, Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh and other early sites in Bihar are covered in Chapter 4 (map 3). Mathura emerged as a major urban centre in the Early Historic period as well, and by the first century BC it was attracting significant Hindu, Buddhist and Jain patronage. References to the city abound in ancient literature, whether secular or Buddhist, Jain or Brahmanical.[29] To a great extent, the city's importance rests on its claim to be the birthplace of Krishna, and this continues to make it one of the principal pilgrimage sites for Vaishnavas (devotees of Vishnu, of whom Krishna is a major avatar). The art history of Mathura is not based on the material discovered from the confines of the ancient or modern limits of Mathura city; it refers instead to the sculpture from the Mathura sphere of influence, which seems to have extended far beyond the city limits.

Sculptures from Mathura, along with those of Gandhara, were among the first to be noted by collectors for their aesthetic appeal. Mathura city, with its long settled history of continuous occupation from at least the third century BC, offered a rich stock to be explored (or ransacked) by early archaeologists and amateurs digging for pieces of history. Excavating the area is difficult, as most of the region is built up and remains inhabited. Further, it has been subjected to endless unscientific digging in the hope of retrieving valuable Kushan stone sculptures. Archaeological contexts and data sets are thus disturbed and often irretrievably lost.

The Buddhist sculpture of Mathura asserted a strong independent identity, equal to the enormous building and sculptural activity at Sanchi in Central India, Amaravati in Southern India and Gandhara in the northwest. The 'Mathuran' styles were already prolific before the period of the Kushans, when they reached their more celebrated heights, and the region was to remain a significant producer of sculpture well into the time of the Guptas. The (usually) lower-relief pre-Kushan and higher-relief Kushan sculpture was mostly made on pillars that surrounded stupas. These were typically crafted in deep pink sandstone mottled with white specks (cats. 89–91, 94–107). Sculptures from the Mathura region were exported to various North Indian sites in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, and even to far off places such as Taxila in the northwest and Chandraketugarh in West Bengal. Their sculptural style is characterised by sensuous images that lay emphasis on the fullness or volumes of the human form in graceful postures. Mathura had close political ties with Gandhara and cross-influences can be seen in the hybrid styles of some sculptures from both regions. A large number of Hindu and Buddhist deities were first given a clear iconographic form in the Kushan period,[30] and the Ashmolean possesses a few representative examples of these (cats. 98, 104–105).

Over a dozen large urban settlements are known in the region of Uttar Pradesh. Kaushambi (cats. 73–76, 83–86), a prominent city situated near modern Allahabad, was probably only slightly smaller an ancient settlement than Mathura. Its Buddhist citizens erected a stupa, the sandstone railing pillars of which, along with sculptures both of stone and terracotta, have been found there. The archaeology of large urban centres such as Mathura and Kaushambi is also rich in finds of terracottas. This is equally true of Vaishali, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Shravasti, Sankissa, Lumbini and Kushinagara – all sites in the regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which, being associated with the Buddha's visits, comprise the most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage places in the world. These cities became associated with specific events in the Buddha's life and entered Buddhist lore, from where they made their way also into Buddhist iconography. The places listed above are only the most prominent, worthy of an introduction to the region – and in fact there are scores more that the specialist visitor may find rewarding.

It is worth outlining the importance of such sites. Lumbini, for example, is the sacred grove where the Buddha was born. The place was marked by Ashoka with a pillar (the Rummindei pillar). Any other structures that would have been built by Ashoka are now lost and may still be buried under later constructions. The remains of two stupas are still to be found at the site.

Bodh Gaya is the site where the Bodhi tree is enshrined and has been worshipped as the spot where Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became the Buddha. The present tree is said to be an 1876 regrowth of a tree which was also a descendant of the original one. An ancient Mauryan platform marks the sacred spot, enclosed by a stone railing built a few centuries later; these lie in the shadow of a colossal temple. Sarnath, near Varanasi, is where the Buddha delivered his first sermon, and thus 'set in motion the wheel' of the Buddhist faith. The site houses a famous Ashokan lion capital (fig. 17) that would once have crowned a massive monolithic pillar, apart from a huge statue of the Bhikshu Bala's Bodhisattva (fig. 21), which remains one of the earliest Buddhist statues in the world, and several later Buddhas in the Gupta style for which the site is equally famous. Sporadic excavations at Sarnath, a moderately-sized site with the remains of a large stupa and a number of other structures, have continued to reveal important finds until recently.

Fig. 20 | Ruined Buddhist Stupa (Sphola Stupa) in the Khyber Pass, 2nd to 4th centuries ad. Photo: John Burke, 1878 (British Library)

Rajgir, the ancient capital of Magadha, is nestled in a set of low-lying forested hills where the Buddha spent much time. It has extraordinary natural formations, caves and sulphur springs. However, the site has suffered the depredations of time, and there is little to see of its Buddhist past, despite the rich references to it in ancient Buddhist literature.

Shravasti, then the capital of the kingdom of Koshala, has in its environs the first Buddhist monastery of Jetavana and another called the Purvarama. A large number of ancient structures are to be found there, including an early Mathura sculpture of the Buddha donated by the monk Bala, probably the same person who donated the image at Sarnath.

Kushinagara, where the Buddha attained *parinirvana*, has an important stupa which was heavily restored, first in 1876 and then again in 1927 and 1956. However, it had already been the focus for pilgrims in antiquity. A first century AD terracotta image of the Buddha in *dhyana-mudra* (perhaps the earliest showing this pose?) was overlaid with a deposit of the Gupta king Kumaragupta dated somewhere between AD 415–55.[31] Several votive stupas dot the site and eight ancient *viharas* or monasteries have been excavated here.

The Indo-Gangetic Divide

The region known as the Indo–Gangetic Divide (discussed in Chapter 4) is, literally, the land between the Indus and the Ganga rivers; it encompasses Punjab (itself partitioned between India and Pakistan), the modern state of Haryana and portions of their neighbouring states (map 3). It corresponds to the region between ancient Mathura and Gandhara. Archaeological exploration in the area is difficult as it has been under constant habitation and cultivation for millennia: few sites therefore remain intact. However,

some Buddhist sites are found near several other ancient settlements. The most prominent Buddhist stupa discovered in the region is at Sanghol and has been dated to the Kushan period. Excavations have revealed a stupa in the shape of a *dharmachakra*; buried close to it were the dismembered and intact sculpted railing posts of the *vedika* that would have surrounded it. Art historically, these sculptures have been a fortuitous find. Obviously buried for safekeeping in antiquity, the sculptures show a unique idiom within the Kushan style that has a subtle admixture of Gandhara and Mathura styles. Sanghol is near the site of Ropar (ancient Rupnagar), which has a long history of habitation from Northern Black Polished Ware until the Gupta period. Terracotta and bronze art remains are stored in a museum at the site, and some material at the Ashmolean (cats. 79–80) corresponds closely with what was discovered in excavations there.

Sugh in Haryana (not far from Ambala) is also an ancient site, with a stupa in the village of Chaneti a few miles away. The unusual terracotta objects found at Sugh are divided mostly between the National Museum, New Delhi and the Chandigarh Museum, though some pieces are found in other collections, including one in the Ashmolean (cat. 82).

Amin, a village not far from Kurukshetra, has sandstone railing pillars similar in style to the stupa railings from other contemporary sites in North India. At least two Ashokan pillars were erected in Haryana. In the Sultanate period one pillar was brought into the compound of a major mosque at Hissar, and another was brought from the vicinity of Ambala to Delhi, where it stands in the ruins of Feroz Shah Kotla. Again this listing is far from comprehensive, but is mentioned to show how the entire region of Northern India was part of an extended cultural zone, apparently united in its artistic forms. These appear in terracottas for domestic use and sandstone relief sculptures (mostly Buddhist and from the Mathura region), as well as in the presence of *yaksha* and *naga* figures – some of which were monumental and datable to a period as early as the second century BC.

Central India

The capital of the Shunga kingdom was located at Vidisha, just outside which was the large monastic and stupa site of Sanchi. As a major urban centre of the time, Vidisha has a fascinating array of sculptures. One of the most notable, which remains at its outskirts, is the pillar of Heliodorus; it bears an inscription in which its donor declares his adoption of the Bhagavata cult. The city has also revealed important sculptures of *yakshas* and *yakshis*, and another pillar with a capital in the shape of a sacred tree-shrine now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Five miles away, at Udaigiri, are a series of important imperial Gupta Hindu temples, while Sanchi Hill, the best preserved ancient stupa and monastic site of the period (fig. 22), is also about 15 miles away at the confluence of the Betwa and Bes rivers. Of the three main stupas at Sanchi the oldest is No. 2, some way down the hill; it is smaller, has shallow carvings on its *vedika* and is dated to the second century BC. Stupas 3 and 1, which are on top of the hill, are the most impressive. The main stupa, No. 1, is surrounded by a richly carved railing that is dated to the Satavahana period of the first century AD. Nearby are foundations for an ancient apsidal temple and a monastery.

Perhaps the oldest Buddhist carvings in Central India were at Bharhut, some distance from the town of Satna. Very little still survives at the site. The railing with its gateways (*toranas*) were brought to the Indian Museum, Calcutta around 1875 by Cunningham. Subsequent discoveries were housed in the Allahabad Museum, and some pieces are in the National Museum, New Delhi and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai (formerly Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay). The iconographic evidence of

Fig. 21 | Bhik
Bodhisattva,
Early 2nd ce
sandstone, H
Sarnath Site

Fig. 22 | The south side of Stupa 1 at Sanchi in 1920, after its restoration (after Marshall and Foucher, *The Monuments of Sanchi*, vol. 11)

Bharhut remains of the greatest significance in Indian art history. The inscribed sculptures here gave us the early evidence of *yakshas*, sacred trees, *nagas*, *chaityas* and *Jataka* stories, instrumental in deciphering the nature of early Buddhist practices. A small fragmentary head of a *yakshi* from Bharhut is in the Ashmolean's collection (cat. 77).

Apart from the grand, freestanding sculptures of *yakshas*, the imagery from the famous early stupas of Sanchi and Bharhut has been studied ever since the inception of the discipline of Indian art history. Along with Amaravati, they form the major part of the first chapters in the continuous narrative of Indian sculpture. The iconographic content of these images, however, is not exclusively Buddhist, Jain or Hindu, although it appears to belong to all three faiths. Several narratives remain unidentified, making it clear that the ancient myths of these religions have changed sufficiently to be unrecognisable to us now. The imagery also reveals that it is reliant on a long-standing tradition which, because it must have been made in materials such as wood, ivory and clay, has not survived.

Eastern India and the Deccan

There are many more objects from the region of Bengal than from Andhra Pradesh (map 4) in the Museum's collections from the Early Historic period. They are catalogued together in Chapter 5. In the past few decades the dramatic discoveries of Bengal terracottas and ivories have presented art historians with artefacts that question some of the most fundamental assumptions about the nature and development of imagery in India. However, an attempt to fit these discoveries into a narrative of the history of Indian art or the history of Buddhism or Hinduism is still fraught with complex ramifications.

The topography of Bengal is very varied. One of the richest and oldest alluvial plains of the world, this region has been an ancient seat of civilisation. Uplands in the northern part of the state give way to estuarine deltas of two great rivers, the Brahmaputra and the Ganga. The delta is frequently subjected to low-intensity floods and with the level of the land barely a few metres above sea level, significant portions of the region become submerged while others are revealed, at times forcing the population to shift every few years. When such

activity is seen over as long a period as two or three centuries, archaeologically we may encounter surprisingly confusing results that show vast areas as clusters of habitations, although these may never have been simultaneously occupied. It also means that several sites may be buried in this region. The most prominent sites that show habitation from the Mauryan through to Kushan times include Tamluk, Chandraketugarh, Mahasthangarh and Bangarh.

Chandraketugarh (cats. 134, 136, 139) has yielded a wealth of terracotta objects: plaques, large and small, rattles, toy carts and, more recently, large, column-like vases and urns elaborately covered with narratives. It has also yielded wooden objects and ivories (cats. 145, 147) that rival in quality the well-known Begram ivories found in Afghanistan, with which they are contemporary. These objects, sometimes remarkably well preserved, date from the third century BC to the third century AD, the very period in which the most important changes were occurring in Indian religions. No region of India has produced the same variety or quantity of post-Mauryan moulded terracotta. Excavations at Chandraketugarh revealed about six main periods of habitation.[32] In some of the cuttings Period III has been identified as a late Shunga level, characterised by a red stamped ware (sometimes inscribed with Brahmi legends), cast copper coins and large numbers of moulded terracotta plaques. Large numbers of ivory and bone artefacts have also been found from the site, and rarely, stone objects of both semi-precious turquoise and agate, along with those in sandstone.

Orissa

The wars for the acquisition of Kalinga, ancient Orissa, had been cathartic for the Maurya emperor Ashoka, prompting him, so some ancient sources would have us believe, to adopt Buddhism. An important inscription of Kharavela (contemporary of Pushyamitra Shunga and the Indo–Greek Demetrius) at the Hathigumpha cave at Khandagiri in Orissa establishes his achievements as a significant Jain monarch of the second century BC. Remains at the site include *viharas*, pillars and sculpted reliefs in a style akin to contemporary Bodh Gaya, Sanchi and Bharhut. Several Early Historic sites are still relatively unexplored in Orissa and a few terracottas and other small-finds have recently come to light.

The Deccan and South India

Contemporary with the latter half of the so-called Shunga period, in the first century BC the Northern Deccan contributed more fully to the history of the subcontinent, with the ascendancy of the Satavahanas, centred on modern Nasik (map 4). They reaped significant economic benefits from their control over the entire Northern Deccan from coast to coast, in a period that saw a dramatic rise in international trade. The great stupas at Sanchi and Amaravati, the Buddhist rock-cut caves in Western India such as Bhaja, Bedsa and Karla (or Karle/ Karli) and the earliest phase of art at Nagarjunakonda are associated with this dynasty.[33]

At the same time, with the harnessing of the monsoon winds, the long-standing maritime trade between Arabia, the Roman Empire and Peninsular India was expedited, rivalling in quantity and revenue the overland trade which was conducted via Gandhara. This is evident from the ample references in Western classical texts

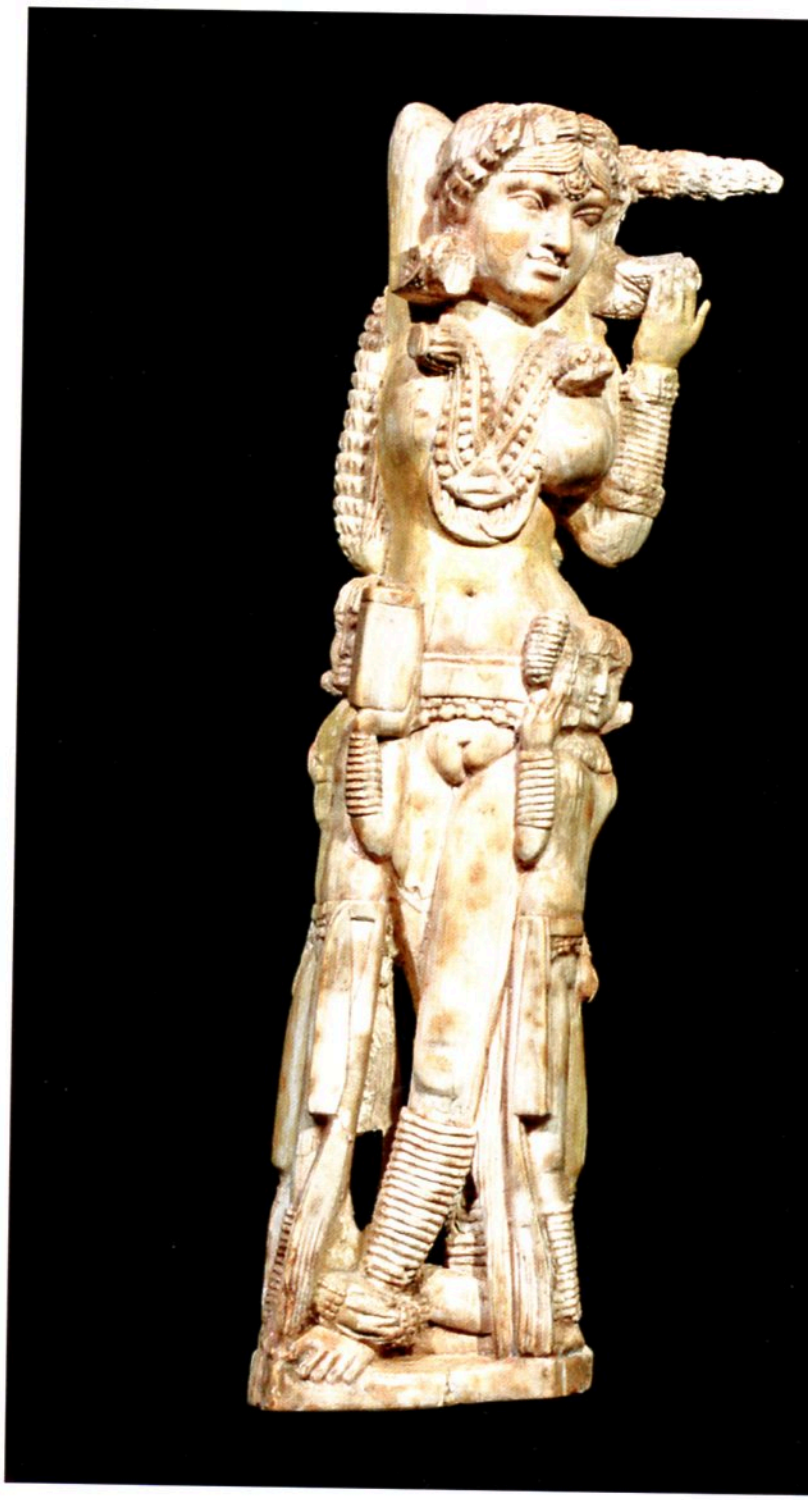

Fig. 23 | Indian i
statuette found
1st century BC. N
National Archae
Museum

Fig. 24 | Excavation photograph of a 2nd century AD stupa in Guntur District in the vicinity of Amaravati (Photo: ASI)

to the commodities exchanged. Noteworthy artistic testimonies of this trade survive in the discovery of an Indian ivory sculpture at Pompeii (fig. 23), amphorae of 'Roman' wine in India, the Roman – or Alexandrian-inspired bronzes and terracottas of the Satavahana period in Western India and the abundant Roman coins found in South India.[34]

Major Buddhist enclaves had developed in Telangana and southeastern Andhra Pradesh, along the Krishna river (fig. 24). The most significant monument of this region, Amaravati, preserves parts of a structure that can be dated as far back as the Mauryan period. Most of the surviving sculpture, now divided between the Madras (Chennai) Museum and the British Museum, has been classified into two broad periods. The earlier of these is coeval with Bharhut (second century BC). Some of the reliefs from this phase bear short inscriptions which, as at Bharhut, either record the names of donors or identify the scenes depicted. These scenes are in low relief, relatively unsophisticated and lacking the naturalism seen in the broadly contemporary monuments of Bharhut, Sanchi Stupa 2 or Bodh Gaya. The figures have wide flat faces and are marked by a stiffness in their stance. The floral decoration is quite fine, and there is greater open space in the whole relief.

This latter feature changes in subsequent relief compositions. In the last phase under Satavahana patronage, the sculptures grow more taut and crowded. The decorative borders become narrower and contain stylised floral or simple petal motifs, unlike the earlier phases in which the vegetation was more naturalistic and lush. The animals and *makaras* become smaller and, importantly, the limbs of the figures become more attenuated and narrow, a feature which is carried into Ikshvaku sculpture at Nagarjunakonda.[35]

Amaravati is close to Dharanikota, the capital of the Satavahanas, which was a significant mercantile entrepôt for a while. Only 500 metres away from the stupa we have evidence of international trade, as excavations there have revealed many Mediterranean-style wares and coins. Some pottery sherds from the Amaravati finds are in the Ashmolean collection (cats. 133–34). The Indian Ocean trade is, of course, also well known at other towns of the Andhra region. It seems that this trade extended right up the Krishna river, and it finds repeated mention in surviving Greek and Roman literature, in the works of writers such as Strabo and Ptolemy. For instance, the *Periplus* mentions the port of Masolia, which we have been able to identify with modern Masulipatnam, less than 100 km away as the crow flies from Amaravati. It is likely that larger ships docked in its harbour then (as they did so until fairly recent times) and smaller dhows would have travelled up the Krishna river.

The *mahastupa* or *mahachaitya* (Great Stupa) of Amaravati is thus a valuable emblem of the religious, aesthetic and economic relationships current in ancient India. The sculptures themselves have served as our best guides to reconstruct the history of the site, its architectural plan and their placement on the building. Art historically, as the period of activity ranges from the second century BC to the end of the third century AD, the sculptures are of particular importance in their representation of both the aniconic and the anthropomorphic images of Buddha.

The patrons for the construction of this monument were both the pious and the commercial classes of Dharanikota. A number of donative inscriptions are found all over the stupa, often giving the names of these people and their professions. We already know that most major stupas, whether Jain or Buddhist, were built on trade routes[36] – for example, Sanchi on the outskirts of Vidisha; Bharhut on the road between Ujjain / Vidisha and Pataliputra; Sarnath outside Kashi; and Amaravati near Dharanikota.

Jaggayapetta, Bhattiprolu, Gummadiduru, Goli, Alluru and the recently discovered Kanganhalli are only some of the other early Buddhist sites in this region. Vaddamanur has perhaps one of the oldest Jain stupas in the region and Gudimallam (near Tirupati) is important for an ancient Shiva *linga* of the second century BC, showing evidence for yet another aspect of the complexity of religious life in the Deccan. The apsidal shrine in which it is housed is still in active worship. This temple has been through several periodic renovations, attested by later Pallava, Chola and Bana inscriptions at the site.

At various points in history, the regions of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have formed a contiguous part of a wider geographical spread that encompassed much of Maharashtra and Karnataka as well, corresponding to

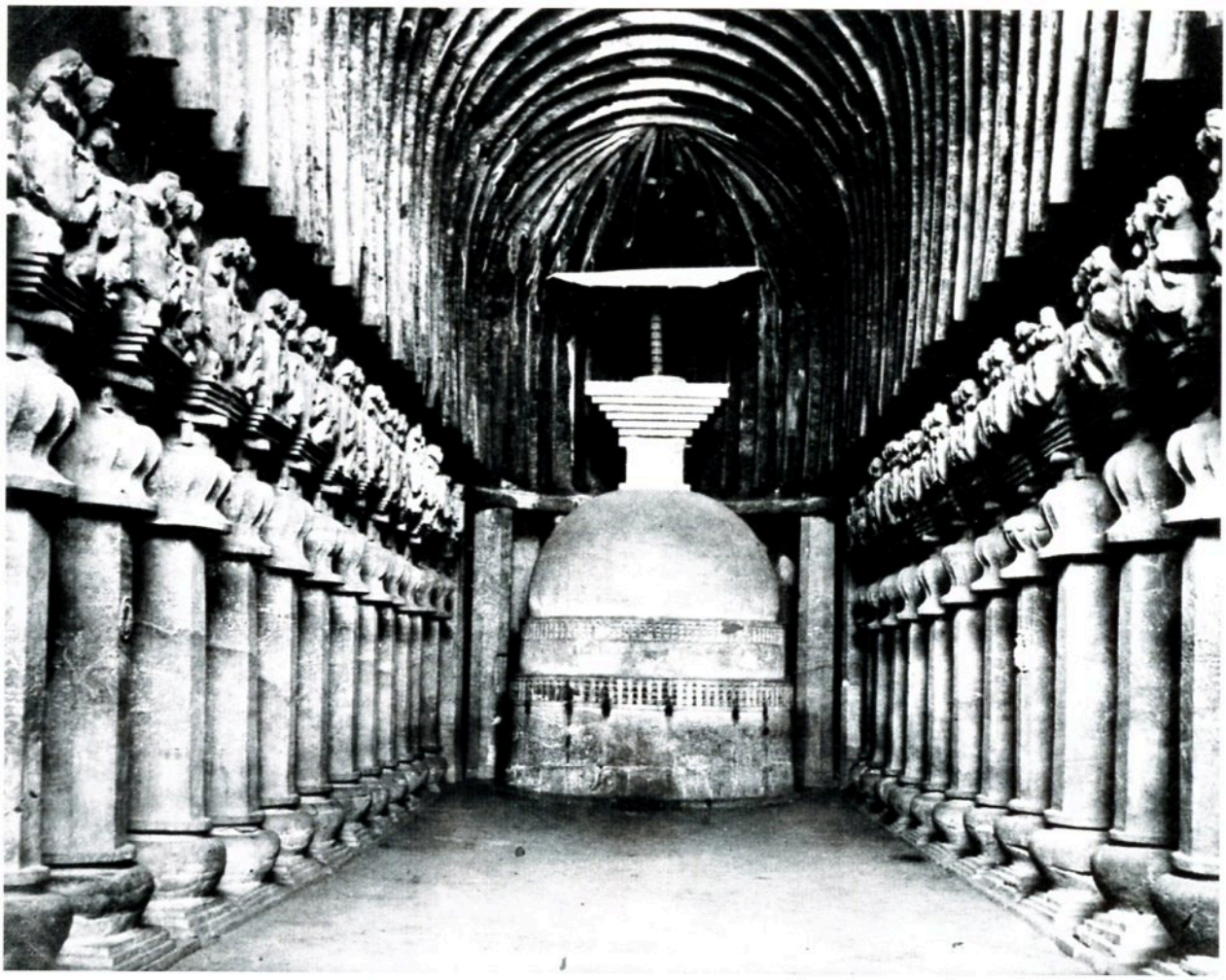

Fig. 25 | Interior
rock-cut chaitya
Maharashtra, c.1
AD (Photo: ASI)

what is later called the Deccan. Terracottas and other small finds between the first century BC and second century AD show very strong similarities within the region's material culture. Sites such as Ter, Kondapur and Paithan have revealed large numbers of distinctly 'Satavahana'-style terracottas. These are almost always double-moulded with a white slip. Despite their local style, they can be associated technologically and thematically with contemporary terracottas from Ptolemaic Egypt, with which the sites in this region were trading.

The art history of Tamil Nadu and Kerala in this period is relatively patchy, and only a few prominent sites are known in these regions. Six rock edicts of Ashoka are known from Mysore district, and several ancient records attest the early presence of Buddhism in the region. The remains of a once-flourishing Buddhist centre of the first century AD are to be seen at Sannathi. However, many early Buddhist sites in the region were transformed, perhaps after the sixth century, to Hindu ones, leaving us with fewer Buddhist remains in Tamil Nadu now than there would once have been.

Western India

In Maharashtra are preserved some of the world's most extraordinary monuments. These huge caves are excavated into the sides of mountains or hills, where they are carved out to look like grand temples, with multiple storeys (figs. 25, 28–29). Although the earliest extant caves from the Mauryan period are found in the Barabar Hills in Bihar (such as the Lomas Rishi), it is in Maharashtra that this technique became pervasive and was practised, with increasing complexity, for nearly 800 years. The earliest caves are all Buddhist. In each case we see that the decorative elements and shape of the caves copy constructions in wood and bamboo. Bhaja, Bedsa and Karle are the most famous of the early caves, but Pitalkhora, Nasik, Kondivte and Kondane, though less impressive for sculptural remains, are as ancient and numerous. Cave 1 at Karle, the sculpted pillars of which form a most impressive colonnade, carries an inscription to say it was made by the Maharathis, known from other sources to be closely related to the Satavahana kings. Several depictions of the Buddha may be found there, but those are later additions. The Ashmolean has a small portion of a Buddhist donative inscription from a fifth or sixth century monument in Western India (cat. 129) which is likely to come from one such cave.

V · THE RISE OF 'ART': ITS LEXICON AND ITS PATRONS

As has been outlined in the previous sections, stone statuary in the historic period seems to have had no precedent before the Mauryan age, and yet when it appears it is rich with Indian symbolism and carved with confidence and sophistication – hardly what one would expect from a fledgling art tradition. Its excellence has led art historians to surmise that this art tradition must originally have developed in media other than stone, of which we now have almost no trace. However, the matter is more problematic than just the absence of an antecedent art tradition. Even the most ancient literary sources of Brahmanism and Buddhism reveal no evidence of sacred images or temple worship. Yet religious imagery and sacred architecture abound after the second century BC. So too do direct and indirect references to them in literature that is generally not thought of as being earlier than the fourth century BC at the earliest.

So what mandate and historical information is there for sculpture and image-making in early India? There have always been conflicting approaches to image worship in India, with several traditions subscribing to aniconism, the worship of or before fire or the elements of nature, for instance. Whereas the major traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism or Jainism may have fixed the iconographies of their cult icons in the post-Mauryan period, many more deities were worshipped locally as village gods and goddesses. For many people the divine image is a *kula devata* (a deity of the family), and for others it is their personal *ishta devata* (one of their own choice or free will). For others still, meditation remains in many Indian traditions the most valid form of spiritual experience, and only some of these permit the use of images as aids to focus the attention, or as symbolic devices that convey higher truths. Some of these debates are germane to our appreciation of icons, because in some way an iconographer or icon-maker would have had to be sensitive to the criticism levied against him by those who did not subscribe to image worship. Images then had to serve, visually, spiritual needs that were being articulated in the complex discourses rooted in experiential and metaphysical philosophy. Equally, it is generally thought that the popularity of image worship perhaps brought the ideas of faith and devotion as a means to enlightenment, the experience of unity and / or the cycle of rebirth (depending on which spiritual tenet was being followed) into the arena of religious discourse.[37]

The rise of image worship and shrines has been attributed to several complex phenomena: the incorporation of chthonic cults (and their practices of worshipping the personified elements, nature and perhaps even figural imagery) into mainstream religion, a general shift toward both theism and devotionalism in Indian philosophy, and the contact with several othe image-worshipping cultures, including the Hellenistic and Achaemenid. Traces of all of these are seen in the post-Mauryan sculptural arts. Images may also have been mimetic substitutes of rituals, and some narrative preserved in relief sculpture have been interpreted as th performance of rites, commemorated at sacred shrines. Equally, some images, especially ex-votos of terracotta and other small-finds, appear to have a talismanic quality, where the image might have been a potent offering for specific, efficacious benefits.

When imagery does start to appear in India, after the third century BC, figures appear with a complex visual vocabulary of attributes and symbols, gestures and postures. This vocabulary is evident both in the emphatically courtly arts of the Mauryas, such as the outstanding imagery on the monolithic pillars (fig. 17), and at the opposite end of the social spectrum in the far more humble figures in terracotta or carved on so-called disc and ring stones (cats. 69, 71). These popular elements of Mauryan arts had tremendous bearing on the period that succeeded it. A revolutionary invasion of the plastic arts into every aspect of daily life can be detected between the second century BC and second century AD. Thousands of small antiquities survive, mostly in terracotta and wood, at times in bronze and silver, and in some regions in ivory, gold and other precious media. The Ashmolean has a number of these (cats. 30–31, 54–55, 74–75, 81, 138, 145, 149). Exquisite though these terracottas and ivories are, we still do not know for sure who the figures consistently represented in this early pantheon may be.[38]

From the same period also come a number of public monuments in stone, where elaborate narratives are carved on the stupa railings of the increasingly popular, proselytising Buddhists and Jains. Their worship was centred on the cult of the veneration of relics housed in stupas. In the politically fragmented post-Mauryan period (*c.* 250 BC–AD 100) pre-existing brick and clay stupas, such as those at Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Mathura, began to attract a vibrant tradition of additional stone sculptures and buildings sponsored by the growing middle classes.[39] Some of the earliest Hindu sculptures of Shiva, Indra, Vishnu, Lakshmi and other forms of the Goddess also made their first appearance in stone.[40] It is in the same narrative friezes that we often find reference to some of the earliest Indian nature-worshipping and animistic cults: *yakshas*, *nagas*, *gandharvas* and *bhutas*, for instance. Often these growing cults expressed themselves in the local vernacular, which gave a fillip to various regional Prakrits – the prototypes of the various modern Indian languages – in addition to works in Sanskrit.

There is no single hierarchy of Indian images. The pantheons of Indian deities vary according to region,

cult, caste, historical or political contexts. However, there is a more or less fixed language of communication that is employed by these images. With the permutation and combination of gestures (*mudras*) and postures (*asanas*), as well as a finite range of visual symbols usually thought of as attributes, sculptors managed to create an iconographic vocabulary, certainly by the first century BC if not earlier. Gods and goddesses are usually shown holding different kinds of weapons or attributes that mean different things depending on their contexts. Martial attributes such as a sword, trident, axe or spear are usually shown to empower the divinity both physically and spiritually (so he or she might cut through egotism or ignorance, for instance), with each weapon playing an important role in the god's myth. A lotus is taken as a symbol of purity, transcendence and wisdom, while a wheel or chakra is both a weapon and a symbolic reference to cyclical time (called *kala*) in which death is followed by rebirth.[41] By the first century AD, many attributes had become associated with specific images. However, sculptors have always been quick to embody any new revelations or visions of divinity that people might have had – a process that continued to create a wonderful array of gods and goddesses. Once the system of communicating ideas through images was fixed, the sculptors' lexicon or vocabulary of symbols could be used to read any mythological narrative that the artist wanted to convey in stone. Every new image is given its own '*nama*', or name, and '*rupa*', or 'form' using that vocabulary of symbols.

A multiplicity of images confronts any visitor to India – not only in the grand temples and stupas, but also on the walls of shops and cinemas, paraded in processions on the streets and positioned before a driver in vehicles. People are constantly seen to interact with images of the divine in many ways: as objects of fetish or talismans as well as symbolic referents to subtle psychological states. The principal nature of the interaction with images in temples is to 'take *darshan*' of the image. *Darshan* literally means 'to view', but the act of viewing in the Indian religious context is a dynamic one. Gods grant *darshan*, and worshippers receive *darshan* where they make eye contact with the image, clasp their palms together in prayer and bow before the divinity, privately exchanging their energy with the spirit of the divine.[42]

As far as historical Indian sculptures are concerned, only in very exceptional cases have the names of their artists come to light. It is generally assumed that this was because divine sculpture was made in the service of temples, where it would be inappropriate to place one's signature. That authorship of a work was less important than the *sadhana*, the selfless, meditative act of its creation, is a view that is less favoured nowadays. All the same, this attitude must undeniably have impressed upon some of the artists; in some art works at least, one is able to detect a quality of understanding and empathy for the subject matter, lending the requisite spirituality to their works. However, such a view presents the artist as being eternally god-fearing, a transcendentally minded subscriber to the cult for which he was making images. Yet even limited research on the workings of artists' guilds shows them to have been equally skilled at making images for a variety of cults and religions.

Such debates on the nature of the artist and his personal beliefs and the absence of signatures are not peculiar to India alone. There are few artists' signatures known across the world before the sixteenth century. Undoubtedly artists in ancient India must have competed with one another to get the best commissions, but their signatures are seldom found. Recent scholarship has brought to light masons' and guild-marks and in fact, very rarely, even the odd signature.[43] Most artists worked in guilds, and it would not have been appropriate for a single person to take credit for work that was collectively produced. Further, religious sculptures were made on commission for patrons who usually expected their patronage to be recorded on a work, either by inscription or sometimes by the symbolic inclusion of their portrait (or sometimes with both devices), rather than the artist whose services had been bought to make the work. It may have been inappropriate for the artist to have left his signature or some trace of his presence. At the same time, one cannot entirely discount the importance of recognising the spiritually motivating forces behind a work of art. These images were made by the artists to express, if not their own, then their patron's faith or system of philosophical action, a religion which he or she held deeply personal.

There exists a long history of *murtividya*, or the science of sculpture, and several texts on it are usually dated to a period only after the fifth century. They form part of a genre of literature called the *shilpashastras* (medieval texts on art, architecture and design) and *agamas* (collections of scriptures on liturgy, temple construction and iconometry, written with reference to specific historical locations and periods). From the same period come a large body of *Puranas*, mythologies and histories, which also contain sections on *pratimalakshana*, or tools for the appreciation of images. These are not, however, the only ancient Indian texts on art. The complementary concepts of aesthetic appreciation of *rasa* and *ananda* had already been included in the *Natyashastra* by Bharata, probably as early as the second century BC.

In fact, a rich vocabulary of aesthetics is available in Sanskrit literature, for the arts – music, dance, sculpture, architecture, drama, literature or painting – have traditionally occupied a special place in Indian culture. Ancient texts maintain that art has the ability to mediate between the worlds of ritual and myth, the everyday human and the divine. Ancient Sanskrit texts that discussed the nature of art say that it provokes us to

think; moreover, it has the ability to allow us momentarily to forget ourselves and the world we inhabit and to be one with the work of art. That transportation to a state of 'oneness' through savouring the arts is, according to Indian tradition, to experience *ananda*, or bliss. In order to do this the art form should preferably, but not necessarily, be holy or spiritual. It must only have the capacity to cause an 'artistic experience' where the audience or viewer empathises in totality with the portrayed. Equally, the viewer's eye must be sensitised and educated to be able to share and savour that joyous essence, or *rasa*, of a work.[44]

Indian culture is famous, or notorious, for its propensity to classify, categorise and enumerate all manner of phenomena, from the most mundane to the metaphysical. Often a grammar for both the manufacture (including systems of iconometry and orders of architecture) and the appreciation (even affect) of art is laid down in the type of texts mentioned above. What is also worth considering is that often dramatic personae (especially the ones drawn from the epics) become ideals for imagery. However, these texts themselves are not always consistent and have been subject to interpolations. Perhaps this inconsistency is indicative of the changes in time and location of their composition, wherein they have been modified to accommodate new trends by writing a new text. Consequently a multiplicity of texts have come down to us.

As mentioned above, the texts most directly concerned with iconography and architecture are the *Shastras* and *Agamas*. *Shastras* on art can be of various categories, such as *Vastu* (architecture), *Shilpa* (sculpture), *Chitra* (painting primarily, but also sculpture), *Sangita* (music), *Natya* (drama) and *Kavya* (poetry). However, when we read these texts we find that each of the texts is concerned, at least in some measure, with other arts as well. Even if the texts available do not mirror or explain exactly a particular work of art or architecture, they nonetheless provide a framework for a worldview within which the work of art might be better understood by us.[45]

Critics have, in recent years, been at pains to find exact correspondences between theory and practice, manuals of ancient sculpture and architecture on the one hand and actual works of art and architecture on the other. Exact correspondences, however, are rare. Scholars have also been struck by the divergent and extensive terminology available in Indian sources for art and architecture. What was thought to be merely a lack of consensus or fixity in language can also be understood, however, as a variety of dialects and linguistic traditions preserving vernacular or regional stylistic traditions. The rich vocabulary of aesthetic terminology for the appreciation of art, however, is shared between poetics, literary aesthetics, music and other areas such as esoteric alchemy or even culinary experience. Much can, therefore, be misunderstood in unsympathetic translation. The conflation of terms demands a drawing out of an appropriate meaning by being steeped in the right context. The presence of this rich vocabulary and the consistency in the system of its categorisation (even if the contents of each category vary in their individual details) are themselves indicative of the historical richness of a culture's ideas: one in which art formed an integrated part of lived experience.

The arts and their surviving material remains invite us to ponder both the thought that imbues these images and their contemporary cultural history, as they do the utilitarian and ritual functions of which they are vestiges. The larger stone and bronze sculptures come from specific monuments, in which they may have had particular symbolic meanings in one age, perhaps slightly different ones in another, their compelling artistry allowing them to reinvent themselves in order to have significance to their audience for hundreds of years. They were placed in appropriate places and, in the Hindu, Jain and even later Buddhist traditions, they were also consecrated. Individual sects within these three main religions may have differences in how they treated their images, and in what they believed made their images 'alive'. In some Hindu traditions they were, and are, offered food, drink, incense and entertainment; on some occasions they are painted and on others dressed in cloth, as if they were living receptacles of divine energy who watched over their devotees, and in whose name kings and priests ruled their domains. Temples thus became spaces for performances, and as performances became sacred or classical, entire systems of music and dance were preserved at the behest of temples. The same is true of textile and culinary traditions.

Temples were thus no doubt important patrons and consumers of the arts. And kings, it goes without saying, have from time to time been the most prolific patrons of the arts. Mauryan pillars, for instance, were all quarried at Chunar near Banaras, from where they were transported to far-flung parts of India. The nature and tone of Ashoka's inscriptions in the edicts on his pillars betray a certain paternalism as well as an exalted opinion of himself. For instance, he refers to himself as '*devanam piyadassi*', the beloved of the gods. This does not mean that he saw himself as divine, but he did perhaps see that he was a leader among men, divinely ordained to be so. Such beliefs were, of course, found in other cultures also on the borders of India. Persian kings had been projecting themselves as god-kings for centuries, and Alexander too is said to have adopted Persian titles and customs. Nor is the concept of divine kingship without Vedic metaphors in Indian history, and it could well be, therefore, that ancient concepts of the Chakravartin, or 'Wheel-turning' universal monarch, were already widespread.

By the first century AD, portraits of kings circulated widely on coins and even appeared in stone at royal shrines, built for the Satavahanas at Nanaghat (Junnar) in Maharashtra and for the Kushan royals at Mat near Mathura and Surkh Kotal in Afghanistan. These testify to the Kushans' curious mix of religion and politics with self-promotion, and also to their shrewd use of Parthian, Scythian and Iranian prototypes in the Indian context.[46] Udaigiri, a site of the Gupta period near Vidisha in Central India, has been recently shown to be a royal site par excellence, where its carvings and temples create visual metaphors to symbolise the cosmic sacredness of the god-king Chandragupta II (*c.*375–415 AD).[47] Rather than use sacred imagery simply to support or promote royal status, at Udaigiri images and iconography also interface with astrology – a powerful concept that laid cosmological claims for the depicted and the patron.

However, as the terracottas, ivories and other small-finds in the Ashmolean's collection show, urban people were equally important and plentiful consumers of art. These artefacts are not always religious, a fact that is of no small importance, for it demonstrates that aesthetically guided creative production of objects was meant for peoples' homes, not only for grand temples and palaces. Buddhist monuments (*stupas* and *chaitya* caves) from the post-Mauryan period were not, in fact, always built with imperial patronage. Inscriptions on them abound that show they were often built by collective patronage involving a guild or a community.[48]

Some inscriptions on sculpted reliefs reveal that they were donated by women. In the Satavahana realm we know of prominent queens such as Balasri and Nayanika or Naganika, who made donations of rock-cut caves. At other Buddhist sites, however, we have inscriptions naming courtesans and nuns as well. This is significant, revealing that women held wealth and had some agency as patrons.[49] However, whether their patronage went so far as to influence the nature of the subject matter selected for sculpting is debatable.[50]

Sacred Iconography

Yakshas have been much referred to already, as they were prolifically depicted in early Indian art. They are as fanciful as they are powerful, capable of changing their form and being omnipresent, and were fundamentally associated with trees and other elements of nature. By the first century BC their cult was undergoing major changes. Their supremacy was waning, with the growing popularity of the emerging icons of the Buddha, Shiva, Vishnu and the other major Indian deities. Where it could not be supplanted or subdued, the *yaksha* cult was incorporated into these emerging popular cults as depotentiated, semi-divine figures subservient to the new gods. In these contexts, *yakshas* and their female counterparts *yakshis* (or *yakshinis*) are deities who continued to emanate both fertile, auspicious comeliness and a potentially ferocious power.[51]

Such images also allowed artists to show contemporary physical ideals of beauty. *Yakshis* are usually depicted as voluptuous, the graceful fluidity of their pose contrasting with their dominant and powerful presence. They are usually portrayed standing on a *vahana* (a mount or vehicle); they are also seen standing in *tribhanga* (the classic posture with three bends in the body at the neck and hip) as *Shalabhanjika* figures. In an ancient fertility rite, beautiful young maidens were said to usher in spring by kicking a tree trunk while breaking a branch, to arouse the tree into blossoming. The *Shalabhanjika Yakshi* (literally, the *yakshi* who is breaking a branch of the Shala tree) serves as a fertility symbol associated with the spirits of the tree and earth, to ensure the auspiciousness of the site.

The smaller terracottas and small votive offerings that form the bulk of this book, on the other hand, occupy a separate and neglected part of the historical documents of India. These everyday objects, sometimes called 'minor' antiquities, are so called because of their small size and perceived relative unimportance. Yet they tell a more nuanced history of Indian religion, relating to the ephemeral festivals and rituals that people practised. They also remind us of the many cults that have not survived, or of others that were absorbed into Buddhism and Hinduism.

In the early Buddhist tradition until the first century AD, there appears to have been a great reluctance to adopt the image of the Buddha for worship. Later the image was looked upon as a sacred relic that embodied the Buddha's energy. It personified the Buddha's message, or Dharma, and was a reminder of the most important moments in the Buddha's life. Still later, by the fifth to sixth centuries, the cores of some Buddhist images began to be filled with sacred relics or manuscripts, lending them a protective or almost magical purpose.[52]

Apart from the major cult icons of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, the second to fourth centuries at Mathura were also notable for depictions of *yakshis* on the stone railing pillars that surrounded stupas. Although undoubtedly carved here with a greater attention to their erotic appeal, the iconography of *yakshis* had already been known for a few hundred years; it appeared in the sculptures of Bharhut (cat. 77) and in terracotta reliefs of the second century BC (cat. 136). The worship of nature spirits such as *yakshas* and *yakshis* had prevailed across India probably long before the advent of Buddhism. The fact that Buddhism embraced these deities, welcoming them into its pantheon and depicting them at stupas, allowed the religion to be adopted with greater ease and familiarity by the *yaksha* worshippers. Their local pantheon was not denied or rendered impotent, but rather subordinated to larger, more powerful presiding

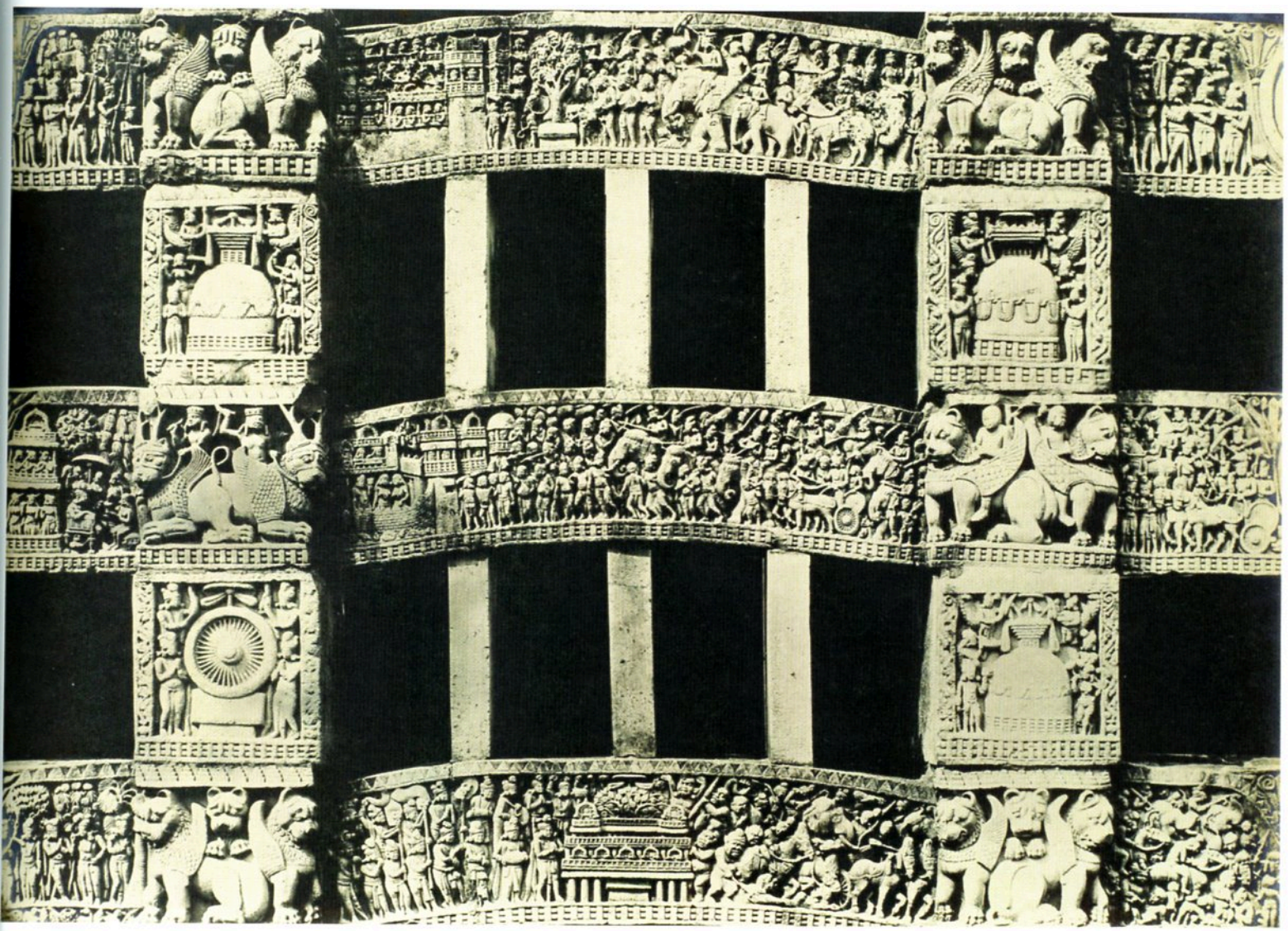

Fig. 26 | Detail of sculpted torana gateway at Sanchi, Stupa 1 (Alkazi Collection)

members. This welcoming of subsidiary deities into Buddhism became a model repeated several times in history, and by several different cults. Similar developments aided Buddhism's own dissemination and transformation across Tibet and Southeast Asia 700 years later.

As has been mentioned, one of the most important Shunga remains is a pillar at Besnagar, outside modern Vidisha in Central India. It was erected by a certain Heliodorus, the envoy of King Antialkidas of Taxila to one of the later Shunga kings. On this pillar, which was crowned by an image of Garuda (the celestial bird, usually conceived as a kite, who is both a mount for Vishnu and popular in Buddhist mythology), Heliodorus left an inscription declaring that he had converted to a Hindu faith called Bhagavatism – an aspect of the cult of Vasudeva, a deity who in later periods at least denotes the gods Krishna or Vishnu. The inscription is important as it provides incontrovertible evidence for a theistic devotional cult, a prerequisite to an image-worshipping cult.

It was thus in the wake of this rising focus on worshipping cult icons that Buddhism too capitulated, losing its initial reservations to making images of the Buddha by the first century AD. There must indeed have been, as testified by this pillar, an interaction between the Indo–Greek northwest and mainland India at various levels. But for the most part, particularly with regard to territory and warfare, the northwest was equally embroiled in politics further west, in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Bactria and Persia.

Famous among the earliest images of the Buddha is the so-called Bhikshu Bala's Bodhisattva at Sarnath (fig. 21), dated to the third year of King Kanishka's reign. The sculpture represents the Buddha, who would have held his missing hand in *abhaya mudra*. This enormous image (almost 3 m high) derives from the pre-existing cult of large *yakshas*, and makes a strong case for the influence of *yaksha* imagery on the creation of the Buddha image. The large detached hand of the Buddha in the Museum's collection, also raised in the *abhaya* gesture, would have come from a similar image (cat. 92). Such standing Mathura Buddhas are stylistically akin to the much older Indian tradition of *yakshas*, the tree or nature spirits who formed an integral part

of pre-Buddhist autochthonous devotion. Typically they are shown with large, thick-set bodies, wearing a single light, unstitched robe that covers the right shoulder and leaves the left bare, and are carved from the distinctive Mathura spotted red sandstone in a style characteristic of the first and second centuries AD. Mathura had by then become a city of no small importance, and examples of early Mathura-style Buddha and Bodhisattva images began to travel far in antiquity – to Bihar, Bengal and to Gandhara, for example, from where examples have been recovered.

Various seated Buddhas are seen in *padmasana* (the lotus position), with one hand in *abhaya*. They can be found seated before a large halo with scalloped edges set before a Pipal tree, usually flanked by the Bodhisattvas Vajrapani and Avalokiteshvara. The *ushnisha* (cranial protuberance depicted as a top-knot) of these Buddhas resembles a sea-shell called *kaparda*, lending this group the name *Kapardin*. Often they are inscribed and dated, making them of utmost importance for art historical study.

Alfred Foucher, the eminent art historian and archaeologist, suggested that Gandhara was the source of the earliest images of the Buddha, the inhabitants of that region having inherited a long-standing tradition of image making from their Graeco–Roman antecedents.[53] These arguments came at a time of heightened Indian nationalism and stung Indian art historians, who were pained to see their artistic legacy perceived as derivative and reliant on Greek art. It was only in 1927, when a seminal study by Ananda Coomaraswamy challenged that notion, showing that the Buddha's image derived as much from the earlier Indian *yaksha* cult, that the importance and legacy of the latter tradition began to be examined more seriously. Coomaraswamy went on to publish an exhaustive study of *yakshas* and how they were transformed and absorbed into the pantheons of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.[54]

After an initial period of minor differentiation, there has been a strong iconographic consistency in the depiction of the image of the Buddha in all the regional styles of India. The Buddha is shown possessing specific physical features that were set down in the texts as his 32 major and 80 minor *mahapurusha lakshanas*, or signs of a great or higher being. Exceptionally tall, the Buddha towered above men. His head is marked by a cranial protuberance, the *ushnisha*, usually depicted as a topknot of hair. The *urna*, or dot, appears between his eyebrows, the common spot of a *tika* or *tilak* that marks the centre of meditative concentration and the inner, third eye in India, which, according to some Buddhist texts, is actually a spiral of hair that the Buddha is said to have had. His palms and soles are marked with *chakras*, and on his hands the fingers are joined, as though webbed. No doubt many of these features were already iconographic conventions that were being given a validation as divine. Topknots, for instance, are a common style seen in many Indian ascetical traditions, as is the physical marking of the forehead at the spot of the *urna*. His elongated earlobes remind us of his former status as a prince and Bodhisattva who wore heavy ear ornaments that had distended them. His robes usually comprise two garments: the lower covering his legs and an upper draped over the torso.[55] Three lines may be incised on his neck. The possession of these special physical and temperamental features in the early texts provided the validation for later sects, such as the Tibetans, to seek out their own classified features when a Dalai Lama is to be selected.

In addition, the Buddha was represented with a given set of gestures (*mudras*) and postures (*asanas*). The hands in the lap of the seated image indicate meditation, a position called *dhyanamudra*; while the seated Buddha with his right hand touching the ground, palm turned inwards, refers to the moment when he called the earth to witness his victory over the forces of Mara and is called the *bhumisparshamudra*. A seated or standing Buddha with his right hand raised, with the palm either fully or partially facing outward, is the gesture of reassurance (called *abhaya* or fearlessness) offered to the faithful, and the right hand pointing downward with the palm facing outwards indicates the gesture of granting a boon or wishes, called the *varadamudra*. When the hands of the seated Buddha are brought together near his chest, the left palm facing up and held below the right which faces down, it refers to the turning of the wheel of the *dharma* or his teaching, and is called the *dharma-chakra-pravartana-mudra*. These were the earliest iconographic modes in which the Buddha was depicted, though other forms were elaborated and added later. Some of these poses also referred directly to a specific site: the act of *bhumisparsha* took place at Bodh Gaya, while the *dharma-chakra-pravartana-mudra* refers to the Buddha's first sermon given at Sarnath. It would have been appropriate for pilgrims to these holy sites to take back an image showing the particular auspicious event associated with the site they had visited. Also first seen in the Kushan period, the pose of the reclining Buddha called the *mahaparinirvana*, conveying his final passing away at Kushinagara, grew to become a popular and monumental image after the fifth century.

Apart from the main Bodhisattvas and the Buddha's own person and life story, few other deities were depicted in the early iconographic conventions of Buddhism. Mention must be made, however, of Panchika and Hariti, the Buddhist tutelary pair, who derive from the world of the *yakshas*. Legend has it that Hariti was a ferocious ogress whose wrath would manifest in the form of epidemics and had to be propitiated through child sacrifice. About a dozen monumental images of Hariti have been found in Gandhara,[56] apart from scores of smaller ones. It is likely that images

of Panchika and Hariti would have been placed at the entrance to monasteries. Examples of these figures are found in the Ashmolean, both from Gandhara and Mathura (cat. 96). Iconographic consistency also developed for the many prominent narratives of the Jatakas, known from the stone reliefs of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Mathura and Gandhara (fig. 28).

Buddhist ideas had been introduced to the north-western regions of Gandhara by the end of the Buddha's lifetime, and by the first century AD were the principal subject matter of the region's artistic activity in stone and stucco. Of the various Buddhist sects in the region such as the Dharmaguptakas, Sautrantikas, Mulasarvastivadins and others, art historians have particularly focussed on the cult of Mahayana Buddhism. Artistically this school made a lasting impact in further developing the iconographies of Bodhisattvas such as Siddhartha (the Buddha before he achieved enlightenment), Vajrapani (who holds a thunderbolt), Maitreya (the future Buddha, who holds a water pot) and Padmapani (the embodiment of compassion, who holds a lotus). The Buddhist settlements of Gandhara had a strong influence on the arts of Western China and the rest of Central Asia and Kashmir. In turn, these influences spread to Western Tibet and as far as Japan.

The stupa at Kankali Tila, in the vicinity of Mathura, is particularly associated with the Jains and a number of images of Jina figures were recovered there (cat. 106). Jinas can be found seated in *dhyana* or meditation, or standing in *kayotsarga* with their elongated arms falling by their sides. Being virtually indistinguishable from Buddha images but for their nudity, and in later images the possession of a *shrivatsa* symbol on the chest, fragmentary Jina heads can sometimes be misattributed as Buddhas, or vice versa.

Although there is evidence for their worship since the second to first centuries BC, three major deities came to dominate Hindu worship by the Gupta period (fourth to fifth centuries AD): the two male gods Shiva (cats. 113–115) and Vishnu (cats. 62, 105, 117) and the great Goddess, Devi or Shakti (meaning power / energy) (cat. 98). Their followers are known as Shaivas, Vaishnavas and Shaktas respectively. Shiva, the 'auspicious one', may be looked upon as the god of change. He is known for his mercurial nature that leads him to destroy, which in the Hindu view allows for rebirth. Known as both the supreme ascetic who has given up all material desire, he is also worshipped as the devoted family man when shown accompanied by his wife Uma (also known as Parvati) and their sons Ganesha and Skanda (or Karttikeya). Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, is a remover of obstacles; he is therefore worshipped before any task is begun. Karttikeya is portrayed as a youthful warrior (cats. 57, 66). Iconographically Shiva is mostly represented in his form as the *linga*, an aniconic sign deriving from the shape of an erect phallus that is usually shown as a cylinder or pillar with a domed top. The *linga* holds within it potential for creation and is perceived as the most potent expression of the god, using its sexual metaphor for transcendental energy.[57]

Apart from Buddhist images, Mathura has revealed some of the earliest Hindu images, which are usually of a smaller size; examples appear in this catalogue (cats. 95, 127). Shiva, for instance, is found worshipped as a *linga*, as an anthropomorphic image with a third eye, and as *Ardhanarishvara*, the composite half-male and half-female form, symbolically transcending all duality to reveal the oneness of divinity. Karttikeya or Skanda, the youthful warlord, seems to have been an early Indian cult icon who probably held a major following of his own; he was at some stage amalgamated into the broader Shaivite pantheon (cats. 57, 66).

Vishnu is looked upon as the Preserver, maintaining order in the universe. Portrayed like an orthodox king (cat. 117), he ensures the stable passage of time. Popularly Vishnu is believed to have ten incarnations or avatars, of which the last one, Kalki (shown as a horse), will manifest himself in the future. The most popular incarnations in the past few centuries have been the seventh, Rama, the moral epic hero of the *Ramayana* who vanquished the evil king Ravana with the help of the superhuman Hanuman, and the eighth, Krishna, one of the heroes of the *Mahabharata* – within which he is seen as a counsellor who expounded one of the holy books of the Hindus, the *Bhagavad Gita*. The Buddha was also incorporated into the list of Vishnu's avatars as his ninth incarnation, demonstrating Hinduism's shrewd ability to assimilate various heterodox cults into its fold. Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi, the embodiment of prosperity and good fortune and the supreme earth mother. However, incarnations of the god may have their own consorts. Vishnu's consorts in their various manifestations are usually associated with the earth and its productivity. By extension, Vishnu's role in his various myths in each incarnation is about rescuing the earth or establishing stability and order. Rama, for instance, is married to Sita (meaning furrow, born of the earth), while Varaha (the boar incarnation) rescued Prithvi, the earth, who is personified as female.

The early development of Vishnu, as far as can be traced in the period discussed here, is connected with several cults including Bhagavatism (mentioned in the pillar inscription of Heliodorus at Vidisha). Images of Vishnu, particularly in his closely allied antecedent forms of Vasudeva-Krishna and Balarama, associated with the earlier cult of the Panchaviras or the five heroes of Bhagavatism, are also to be found in Mathura (cat. 105). These five heroes are related, but how they are related is not narrated in the same way in all texts. What is clear is that several textual and inscriptional sources survive which attest that this cult heralded Vasudeva

as the supreme lord; but they also reveal more subtle subtexts wherein multiple deities were attached to Vasudeva. 'Vishnu' is the result of the synthesis of three godheads: Vasudeva–Krishna, Vishnu (the Vedic sun god) and Narayana (the god of the Brahmana texts).

Images of Surya, the solar deity, present us with interesting iconographic traits derived from Iranian and Central Asian prototypes. These include his armour, fillet headdress and boots, and they remain enduring characteristics of the god well into the medieval and modern periods (cat. 104). Although Indra, Surya, the *yaksha* Kubera and the goddess Lakshmi are known to us now as principally Hindu gods, they were in fact, common to all early Indian religions each of which developed and utilised their myths to their ends. Without specific excavation contexts for the earliest images, therefore, it can become hard to know whether it was part of a larger Buddhist narrative or a small independent Hindu icon.

A sixth century text called the *Devi Mahatmaya* refers to Mahadevi, literally the great Goddess, who encompasses the thousands of local and orthodox goddesses; she represents an all-embracing feminine principle. While devotees of Shiva may worship the Goddess in her form as Parvati, and the Vaishnavas as Lakshmi, innumerable other feminine deities abound in India. The Goddess is not merely a consort to a male deity, however, but one that stands capable and complete on her own. Artistically she is portrayed as a complex amalgamation of fertility, wrathfulness, benevolence and sensuality; at one instance maternal, at another martial. She is therefore often seen by most Hindus to be the most approachable form of divinity. Her emotional variability and unbridled energy express the creative forces of nature latent in all human beings.[58] Several of the earliest images of Durga, the pre-eminent form of Shakti, have been found in the vicinity of Mathura in her form as *Mahishasura-mardini*, she who kills the buffalo demon Mahisha (cat. 98).

Archaeologically, 'goddess' worship seems to be the most ancient cult in India, and terracotta images now popularly called 'Mother Goddesses', demonstrating exaggerated organs of reproduction and dating from as early as the fifth millennium BC, have been discussed above. Other prominent manifestations of the goddess include Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, the personified river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna, Kali (the terrifying 'Black One') and Durga, the supreme goddess, created from the collective energies of all the gods to vanquish evil.

Both sensuous and explicitly sexual imagery (cat. 147) form a significant part of Indian iconography. Gods are seen with their consorts, their potency often deriving from being a dynamic team, in which the male gods usually personify potentiality and energy that is realised through their feminine consorts, themselves personifications of nature and beauty. The goddesses make the gods more approachable and also reflect the god's power back to them and to the devout, enabling both to see the power of divine energy. Goddesses may be seen as sensuous and seductive, such as the semi-divine *apsarases* or celestial nymphs. Beauty and adornment are looked upon as auspicious and talismanic, and the erotic consummation of love as a reaffirmation of life and power. Such erotic images are, at least in spirit, communicators of another vital Indian doctrine: that of oneness or unity in the midst of a polytheistic panoply of imagery. In the medieval period, various Tantric doctrines were also becoming popular by the seventh century. The Tantras are a group of esoteric religious texts, and several systems of practice and belief are linked to them. Tantras are associated with an emphasis on the female, with sexual symbolism and even some secret esoteric traditions. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism were variously influenced by Tantric doctrines, including their sexual imagery, which became a standard part of sculptural iconography after the eighth century.[59]

Indian gods and goddesses are frequently shown with multiple arms, a phenomenon that becomes more popular after the late Kushan to Gupta period.[60] Although this iconographic device is startling to a Western eye, to its worshippers this was an easy way to show the supernatural powers of the divine. The many arms, each holding a symbolic attribute, reveal the complex balance between wrathful and graceful qualities that lead in each case to true knowledge. These become figures capable of accomplishing several tasks simultaneously, possessing multiple facets and amalgamating or traversing many earthly dualities.

This multiplicity of arms became a pervasive iconographic feature that travelled to most Buddhist countries across Asia. Mostly deities are shown with four arms. In the case of martial deities such as Durga, or in depictions of Vishvarupa, the all-encompassing, terrifying form of Vishnu, or whenever there is cause to show greater dynamism or more complex iconographies, the gods can be shown with many more arms. This developing complexity in the iconographic systems of Indian images is linked to a similar development in religious movements and ideas. The rise of Tantrism in Hinduism and Buddhism is seen almost simultaneously in both religions, and it is often difficult to determine which cult developed which idea first.

Places and Spaces

We do not know very much about the architecture of the earliest periods of ancient India, though those buildings were almost certainly of mud-brick, timber and bamboo. Such evidence as survives, however, is highly important in the history of world architecture. Large cities such as Mohenjodaro and Harappa, built on grid-plans (fig. 6–7) with streets intersecting at right angles, communal

Fig. 27 | Worship of a stupa represented on a relief-carving at Bharhut, sandstone, circa 2nd century BC.

sewerage for each street and grand civic structures, all bespeak a highly developed urban planning that could only be supported by the most complex forms of administration. Although there are a plethora of cities from the Indus period, evidence of such urbanisation is not found again until the Early Historic period, which is broadly thought to have started in the sixth to fifth centuries BC. Rajgir in Bihar for instance, built on an upland area with its natural hot water springs, became a location for a royal capital with temples and monks certainly by the fourth century BC, yet dating the remains of monuments there is largely conjectural.

Excavations at Pataliputra, the Mauryan capital at modern Patna, revealed, in the Kumrahar neighbourhood, remains of an elaborate palace with its tall timber columns and wooden palisades. The capital of one of the pillars excavated there bears a carving of a palmette or anthemion, a motif widespread from Lebanon to India in the last three centuries BC. Scholars have tried to compare the remains of this palace with the Apadana, the palace of the Achaemenids at Persepolis. There are similarities, of course, but that is not to say that the influence from Persepolis need have been direct. After all, ideas drawn from the artistic repertoire and ideals of the Near East, Persians, Egyptians and Greeks had been circulating widely, and indeed the Apadana had set standards of palatial architecture at the time that remained legendary for centuries to come. Other references to 'secular' architecture, including palaces, fortifications, gateways and dwellings, have come to us, for instance, from representations as carvings on the reliefs of Sanchi and Amaravati (fig. 26) and on the walls and facades of the rock-cut caves at Bhaja and Karle (figs. 28–29).

Ancient literary sources, including the epics, *Jatakas* and *Puranas*, reveal important evidence for our knowledge of ancient Indian geography. Cities are mentioned both as pilgrimage centres and as important trade centres, complete with their own fabled royal dynasties, palaces, cultural specialities and courtesans. The cities of Kashi, Ujjain, Ayodhya and their kings became the stuff of legends and epics. This is significant, as it

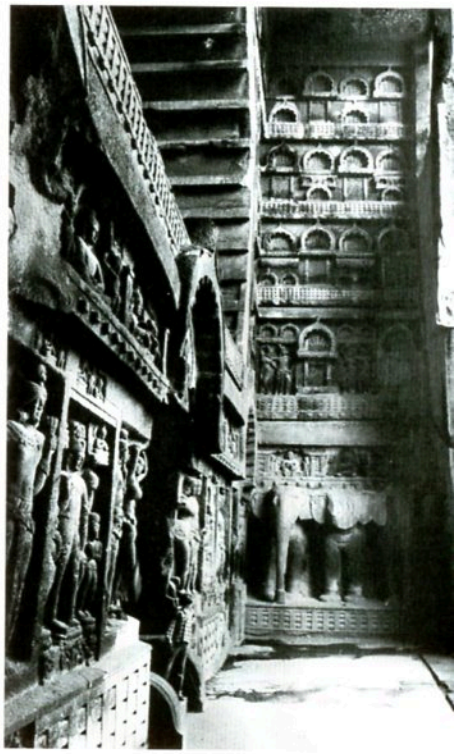

Fig. 28 | Entrance
Cave at Bhaja, Ma
1st century BC (Pl

Fig. 29 | Façade of
entrance to the ca
Karle, Maharasht
century BC–AD

reveals that the lore of cities of one part of the subcontinent was being recounted in another, and this would have gone a long way in creating a pan-subcontinental imagination. Archaeological evidence seems to indicate that communication and trade networks were already well established in the Bronze Age and were further strengthened during the Early Historic period. This again certainly aided the rise of towns in the sixth to fifth centuries BC.

Early Buddhist and Jain worship was centred on the cult of the veneration of relics housed in stupas. The stupa was a round solid and domed brick or stone-built structure (fig. 27), originally a tumulus, that became a hallmark of Buddhism and a potent symbol. It was much more than a tomb that held the relics of a teacher, but came to symbolise *nirvana*, radiating the energy of the Perfected One. Several stupas were erected during the Mauryan period, as has been seen, and many more in the post-Mauryan. Initially these were of mud and brick, but in the post-Mauryan period several were given a stone facing. This was also the period when they were surrounded by gateways called *toranas* and an enclosing stone fence called a *vedika*, which comprises either posts or pillars (often richly sculpted in relief) with cross-bars between them. The *vedika* symbolically divides the sacred space from the profane.

The ground-plan and elevation of stupas did not remain circular or hemispherical. Stupas in the southern regions of Andhra and the Deccan began to emphasise the four cardinal directions, where a number of freestanding pillars were placed. In Gandhara in the northwest, stupas were placed on square plinths. In time their hemispherical form changed to taller cylinders with reduced domes, their drums covered by arcading and niches to house images of the expanding later iconographic forms of the Buddha and associated figures. The singular crowning parasol on the stupa also grew into a tapering finial, composed of multiple parasols of reducing size.

Amongst the earliest rock-cut caves that survive in India are seven excavated into the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills near Gaya, which were built for the ascetics of the Ajivika sect. The most famous of these, the Lomas Rishi, is similar to another cave in its proximity called the Sudama cave, which carries an inscription dating it to 252 BC, in the reign of Ashoka. The cave, although carved into granite, resembles constructions in timber and bamboo and thus reveals evidence of pre-existing architectural traditions. Its façade has the earliest example of a style of arch called the *chaitya*, which can be seen widely represented in Indian architecture. Rock-cut caves in the form of large apsidal halls with vaulted ceilings became common in various parts of the country, and particularly in Maharashtra (figs. 25–28).

Bhaja, Bedsa and Karle are the most famous *chaityas* in Maharashtra. Elaborate, multi-storey shrines, with monastic quarters (*viharas*) and stupas, were painstakingly hewn into the mountains. Created largely between the first century BC and the end of the first century AD, these remarkable caves are excavated into the living rock in the hills of the Western Ghats. Caves had been the favoured retreats of ascetics in the monsoons, and in sponsoring these permanent monastic dwellings devotees were ensuring their spiritual merit for centuries.

In each case, the main shrine is perpendicular to the rock face, with a long colonnaded hall or nave before an apsidal terminus. In the middle of the apse is a solid, rock-cut stupa. Bhaja, perhaps the most impressive of all, has a barrel-vaulted ceiling that rises some 9 m (29 feet) from the ground and retains most of the original wooden ribs added some 2,000 years ago (superfluously in a stone building, but in keeping with traditional wooden constructional needs). At every moment on a visit to these sites one is reminded of how the craftsmen were used to thinking in wood, even as they worked in the relatively newly discovered medium of stone. Latticed windows look as if they are cane or bamboo, and imitation brackets and beams appear to hold up the structure. These extraordinary cave monasteries are usually described as rock-cut architecture, but they are perhaps more akin to sculpture on a gigantic scale.

The apsidal form of shrine is itself of some importance. It becomes codified as one of the orders of Indian temple architecture in the centuries that follow, but its early traces at Vidisha, Mathura, Ter and Chezarla show that this was already a sacred architectural form, being used by the Hindus contemporaneously with its use by Buddhists.

Perhaps the earliest evidence for Hindu-style temple buildings with a *shikhara* or roof tower derives from coins of the second to first centuries BC: coins of the Audambaras of North India certainly show such structures. Yet no surviving temples of this type can be dated before the fifth century AD, in the Gupta period. Different forms of temples were used in worship in the fifth century: both rock-cut and structural temples (that is, those constructed of dressed stone masonry or of bricks) can be ascribed to the Gupta period. That period indeed forms a foundation on which the art and styles of subsequent temple traditions of India and Southeast Asia rest. Various sites in Central and Northern India, such as Mathura, Sarnath, Sanchi, Udaigiri, Nachna, Bhumara, Bhitargaon, Ahichhatra and Deogarh, preserve important remains of Gupta style in stone and terracotta.

The fourth to sixth centuries

The arts of North and Central India reached another apogee under the Gupta emperors, which is taken to start with the establishment of their era upon the accession of Chandragupta I in around 319–20 AD. The Museum holds an important group of representative examples (cats. 113–121, 125–126). The artistically precise and refined bronze, stone and terracotta sculpture from this period formed a major benchmark to which all subsequent Indian art refers. The wall paintings in the caves of Ajanta, made under the reign of the Vakatakas, tributaries of the Guptas, lend an air of unparalleled sophistication to the age. Previous iconographic expressions were distilled into a harmonious and precise aesthetic language in this period. Moreover, the influence of the visual arts of this period spread far beyond the confines of India, to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia and the Far East (China and Japan). A variety of epigraphic and literary sources, ranging from mythologies to histories and drama, further lend this period the aura of a 'golden' or 'classical' age in Indian history.

At the same time, while the hoards of extremely pure gold coins struck by Gupta kings make it seem an age of prosperity, it must be remembered that this wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small elite, within a highly stratified society. Refined though the poetry written in Sanskrit may be, historians of class and gender are all too aware of the sharp distinctions this literature reveals of a stratified and patriarchal society. And the excessively controlled and consistent iconography may itself reflect a cultural hegemony, repressing the free iconographic experimentation of previous years. These latter features have prompted scholars to question the earlier, nationalist nomenclature of the period as a 'golden age'.[61] If the sixth to fourth centuries BC were an age of radical heterodox sects and emerging polities in the world, the fourth to sixth centuries AD were certainly characterised by religiously defined states: the Christian Byzantines, the Zoroastrian Sassanians and the Hindu Guptas.

The art history of the Gupta period warrants some reconsideration. The vast number of Gupta coins and their variety suggest a greater regionalism than the sort of unified picture older textbooks claim for the period. Chronologies have previously been established on the basis of several inscriptions and various literary references. Many of the latter are difficult to date, however, and often refer back to the Gupta period. Often composed in excellent Sanskrit, these texts reveal a fundamental shift in the cultural outlook. The plays lend insight into a world of courtly etiquette, political intrigues, battles and romances. The large corpus of myths collected in the epics appears to have been given a more complete and fixed form.

However, the new genre of literature known as the *Puranas* also saw its earliest development in this period. These massive encyclopaedic compendia are dedicated to specific deities, on whose mythology each of them usually focuses. They incorporate not just the established myths, as corroborated in the older epics, but also appear to draw from several popular as well as regional traditions. The *Puranas* also contain within them other branches of knowledge: geography (and the practice of pilgrimage), histories (from a perspective of genealogies), philosophy (as expounded by the different emergent schools of ascetical Shaivism and Vaishnavism), architecture and iconography, apart from a variety of other matters. These texts are germane to an understanding of Hindu art.

Impressive Hindu sites survive in Central India at Udaigiri, Deogarh, Bhitargaon and Eran, while

outstanding remains from the temples at Ahichhatra and Bhumara lie in museum collections in Delhi, Allahabad and Kolkata (Calcutta). These royal temples mark seats of political and ritual authority, each of which appear to have wielded control over a much larger network of urban sites and agricultural land. At the same time there are several Buddhist sculptures of the period – principally from Sarnath and Mathura, but also from several other sites, testifying to the major patronage they also sustained at the time. Large terracotta plaques also adorned Buddhist monasteries at Devni Mori in Gujarat, Mirpur Khas in Sindh, Nalanda in Bihar and Karno-Suvarno and Paharpur in Bengal. These are variously dated between the fifth to seventh centuries, and show striking similarities in a general style of the age. Yet they equally reveal, through careful study, precise regional inflections within the common stylistic predilections. The importance of the Buddhist sites is moreover attested by the accounts of the visiting pilgrims Xuan Zang and later Fa Hsien, whose detailed travelogues were later instrumental for the Archaeological Survey of India in the rediscovery of many forgotten sites.

The Buddhist monastic centre at Ajanta does not appear, however, to have been visited by either of these Chinese travellers. Ajanta preserves what are considered the classical ideals of Indian beauty, closely mirroring those mentioned in Sanskrit texts.[62] Although very little painting has survived from the period of the monuments and sculptures discussed in this catalogue, there is evidence that it must have been a highly developed art form. Not only do early relief sculptures at Buddhist stupas appear to have been derived from painterly compositional strategies, but sculptures themselves would often have been painted, and temples would have carried extensive narratives and mythologies painted on their walls. A few traces survive at Badami in Karnataka and Ellora and Bagh in Maharashtra. Best preserved are the remarkable painted caves at Ajanta, which burst with life – palaces and gardens, kings, richly attired Bodhisattvas, ascetics, animals and the most seductive women in self-consciously languid poses. Here are depictions of textiles, furniture and ornament that allow us a vivid window into early India. Most of the paintings have been identified as narratives drawn from the *Jatakas*, the mythological stories of the previous lives of the Buddha (fig. 30).

The decline of the Gupta empire is ascribed to various factors. Important among them was the rise of regionalism and the fragmentation of land holdings, as well as a fresh wave of invasions, led this time by the Hephthalite Huns, once again from Central Asia, through the passes of the northwest. The 'Gupta' style, as it has come to be known, remained the dominant form of artistic expression till the mid-sixth century, even when the Gupta and Vakataka dynasties declined. Temples in disparate parts of Central and North India, and indeed as far away as Kashmir, the Northwest Frontier, Gujarat, Karnataka, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia and China, all show influences of this 'Gupta' style (cats. 61, 65, 122–23, 127–28).

Fig. 30 | A loving cou
detail of mural paint
cave 1, Ajanta, Maha
(photo: © roberthar
Alamy Stock Photo)

In the period after the Guptas, temple structures began to grow loftier and their plans ever more complex with each passing century. This made greater areas available for sculpture on the expansive exterior walls, bringing an enormous compositional shift between Gupta and post-Gupta art. A sculpture or relief frieze was no longer confined to communicating its essence in a single work. Rather sculptors had entire temples to cover with imagery, and could stretch the myths and manifestations of the gods across broad temple walls, through series of thematically connected sculptures. Contemporary texts on iconography and temple construction had now therefore to address themselves to the complex task of establishing the appropriate placement of imagery on temples. This development was accompanied, in religious practices, by the rise of esoteric Tantras and a definite move toward a personalised devotion to deities called *bhakti*, and, in art, by a growing pluralism of regional styles after the seventh century. These matters, however, fall beyond the remit of the present catalogue.

outstanding remains from the temples at Ahichhatra and Bhumara lie in museum collections in Delhi, Allahabad and Kolkata (Calcutta). These royal temples mark seats of political and ritual authority, each of which appear to have wielded control over a much larger network of urban sites and agricultural land. At the same time there are several Buddhist sculptures of the period – principally from Sarnath and Mathura, but also from several other sites, testifying to the major patronage they also sustained at the time. Large terracotta plaques also adorned Buddhist monasteries at Devni Mori in Gujarat, Mirpur Khas in Sindh, Nalanda in Bihar and Karno-Suvarno and Paharpur in Bengal. These are variously dated between the fifth to seventh centuries, and show striking similarities in a general style of the age. Yet they equally reveal, through careful study, precise regional inflections within the common stylistic predilections. The importance of the Buddhist sites is moreover attested by the accounts of the visiting pilgrims Xuan Zang and later Fa Hsien, whose detailed travelogues were later instrumental for the Archaeological Survey of India in the rediscovery of many forgotten sites.

The Buddhist monastic centre at Ajanta does not appear, however, to have been visited by either of these Chinese travellers. Ajanta preserves what are considered the classical ideals of Indian beauty, closely mirroring those mentioned in Sanskrit texts.[62] Although very little painting has survived from the period of the monuments and sculptures discussed in this catalogue, there is evidence that it must have been a highly developed art form. Not only do early relief sculptures at Buddhist stupas appear to have been derived from painterly compositional strategies, but sculptures themselves would often have been painted, and temples would have carried extensive narratives and mythologies painted on their walls. A few traces survive at Badami in Karnataka and Ellora and Bagh in Maharashtra. Best preserved are the remarkable painted caves at Ajanta, which burst with life – palaces and gardens, kings, richly attired Bodhisattvas, ascetics, animals and the most seductive women in self-consciously languid poses. Here are depictions of textiles, furniture and ornament that allow us a vivid window into early India. Most of the paintings have been identified as narratives drawn from the *Jatakas*, the mythological stories of the previous lives of the Buddha (fig. 30).

The decline of the Gupta empire is ascribed to various factors. Important among them was the rise of regionalism and the fragmentation of land holdings, as well as a fresh wave of invasions, led this time by the Hephthalite Huns, once again from Central Asia, through the passes of the northwest. The 'Gupta' style, as it has come to be known, remained the dominant form of artistic expression till the mid-sixth century, even when the Gupta and Vakataka dynasties declined. Temples in disparate parts of Central and North India, and indeed as far away as Kashmir, the Northwest Frontier, Gujarat, Karnataka, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia and China, all show influences of this 'Gupta' style (cats. 61, 65, 122–23, 127–28).

Fig. 30 | A lovir
detail of mural
cave 1, Ajanta,
(photo: © robe
Alamy Stock P

In the period after the Guptas, temple structures began to grow loftier and their plans ever more complex with each passing century. This made greater areas available for sculpture on the expansive exterior walls, bringing an enormous compositional shift between Gupta and post-Gupta art. A sculpture or relief frieze was no longer confined to communicating its essence in a single work. Rather sculptors had entire temples to cover with imagery, and could stretch the myths and manifestations of the gods across broad temple walls, through series of thematically connected sculptures. Contemporary texts on iconography and temple construction had now therefore to address themselves to the complex task of establishing the appropriate placement of imagery on temples. This development was accompanied, in religious practices, by the rise of esoteric Tantras and a definite move toward a personalised devotion to deities called *bhakti*, and, in art, by a growing pluralism of regional styles after the seventh century. These matters, however, fall beyond the remit of the present catalogue.

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2

PRE- AND PROTO-HISTORIC SOUTH ASIA

< Detail of Cat. 7

1 Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic tools

Baluchistan, Peninsular and Eastern India
Variously dateable between approximately
1,500,000 BC to 250,000 BC

ILLUSTRATED:

1.1
H. 11.7, W. 6.9, D. 5.3 cm
AN1928.267(z): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by Valentine Ball in Sambalpur, Bengal on 5 February 1876

1.2
H. 11.4, W. 6.2, D. 2.8 cm
AN1962.36: from the Dost ('Zost') Valley, Dera Bugti, Baluchistan. Collected by A. D. Passmore

MIDDLE:

1.3
H. 18.5, W. 10.6, D. 4 cm
AN1928.267(y): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by W. G. Smith in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu on 5 October 1882

1.4
H. 15.5, D. 11.2, W. 4.4 cm
AN1928.267(v): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by W. G. Smith in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu on 27 October 1882

1.5
H. 12.9, W. 8.2, D. 6.1 cm
AN1928.267(p): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by W. G. Smith in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu on 26 October 1882

1.6
H. 11.6, W. 8.8, D. 3 cm
AN1928.267(e): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by R. Bruce Foote from the lateritic gravel in the nullah (dried-up watercourse) at 'Attrampakkum', in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu (possibly in 1863)

BOTTOM:

1.7
H. 11.2, W. 8.3, D. 3.5 cm
AN1896.1908 Pr.3: from Poondi, in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu. From the collection of Sir Heywood W. Seton-Karr, 1903

1.8
H. 15.1, W. 10.1, D. 6 cm
AN1928.267(L): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by R. Bruce Foote from Yedhully, in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu on 15 April 1870

1.9
H. 12.2, W. 5.8, D. 3.85 cm
AN1928.267(k): labelled as coming from the Evans collection. Collected by R. Bruce Foote from Woodekottah, in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu. Laterite

1.10
H. 14.75, W. 10, D. 3.2 cm
AN1910.458: Found in the Penaar Valley, in the region of Madras, Tamil Nadu. From the collection of Sir Heywood W. Seton-Karr, 1910

The illustrated sampling is a small selection from approximately 80 Palaeolithic tools from the Indian subcontinent in the collection of the Department of Antiquities. The few pieces illustrated in this group reveal many cleavers and hand-axes – widely regarded as the hallmark of the Acheulean – and are largely Lower Palaeolithic. These are mostly large cutting tools with various carefully fashioned planoforms, the commonest being oval, pear-shaped, lanceolate and triangular. The cutting edges – convex, concave or straight – extend round much or all of their perimeters. Many hand-axes also have a more or less sharp point and some have a heavy, hammer-shaped butt. They are usually worked bifacially: that is, both main faces have been flaked during the often symmetrical shaping of the implement. Cleavers are more axe-like, with a broad transverse or oblique cutting edge as the main feature and less emphasis on cutting edges at the sides.

The main thrust of scholarship on such objects until the mid-twentieth century was to prepare detailed taxonomies of tool morphology. These were used to postulate broad evolutionary models that encompassed the entire world. Because hand-axes and cleavers are so readily recognisable, they tend to dominate our perception of Acheulean toolkits. However, just as these studies have shown parallels in the types of objects found at African, Middle-Eastern, European and Indian sites, differences have also come to the fore. It is increasingly being discovered that despite their commonalities every Early Stone Age culture also

1.3

1.7

1.1

1.2

1.4

1.5

1.6

1.8

1.9

1.10

contained a number of other implements that sometimes constitute its distinguishing characteristics.

It is said that the Acheulean industries appeared soon after the emergence of a new hominid type, the *Homo erectus*. Although dates as early as 1.8 million years ago have been associated with this development in Indonesia, it is generally accepted that the genesis of the Acheulean tradition lies in the Oldowan technologies of sub-Saharan Africa, where pieces from Tanzania and southern Ethiopia have been dated using the potassium–argon method to even 2.5 million years ago. Dating tools between 1.4 to perhaps even 1.7 million years ago at various places in South Asia is not that uncommon now. Discoveries in South Asia, in the valley of the Soan (or Swan) river that flows out of the mountains into western Punjab in Pakistan, in the lower Shivalik ranges (between the plains of northern India and the higher Himalayas), and recently even at Attirampakkam in Tamil Nadu, have confirmed this. Having considered the breadth of the Acheulean, ranging from India via all of Africa and Europe to Britain, modern scholarship no longer believes that all the traditions are of the same period, nor that they were made by an identical people. It is generally thought that by about 1.8 million years ago the *Homo erectus* humans had developed into *Homo sapiens* and were living as Neanderthals in Europe. Meanwhile in sub-Saharan Africa the process of evolution saw the species develop into *Homo sapiens sapiens*, who by around 100,000 years ago had spread out of Africa to the Near East. By the Middle Pleistocene they are believed to have made their way to India.

The stone tools of the Potwar plateau in the northwestern parts of Pakistan have been dated by the paleomagnetic method, according to which they are 500,000 years old. However, this does not mean that the surviving stone tools prove this was the start of human history in India. It is quite likely that the earliest tools humans made were fashioned from such perishable materials as timber and bamboo, as they are today in much of Asia, especially in China and the countries of Southeast Asia. Further, as evidence from the Soan tradition (which is shared with the Shivalik Hills of North India) has shown, the Acheulean coexists with other lithic assemblages from which the typical hand-axes and cleavers are absent. The Soanian cultures (which may have spread from the Shivalik Hills to Rajasthan) are characterised instead by cobbled tools. These latter factors now make such broad generalisations as 'the Acheulean tradition' seem like imposed designs, based purely on morphological similarities in two or three tool types, rather than on an understanding of the considerable variations between the assemblages of many cultures which happened, at different points in time, to have made a few types of tools similar to those commonly labelled 'Acheulean', as well as the tools that distinguish them from one another.

A comparison of the historical progression at a large number of sites in India shows the variability of archaeological record. Recent research on the Lower to Middle Palaeolithic tools in Central India tentatively suggests that they come from at least the Middle Pleistocene.[1] Dates older than 1,600,000 BC have been suggested for the Lower Palaeolithic at Riwat (near Murree) in Pakistan and at Attirampakkam (near Chennai) in India. Elsewhere, such as sites in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Western Rajasthan and the Potwar plateau, all are variously dated between 700,000 to 350,000 BC. However, Upper Palaeolithic dates vary from 50,000 to 9,000 BC.[2] The small number of tools illustrated here are selected to show the variety of sites – from Baluchistan to Bengal and down to Tamil Nadu – that have a Palaeolithic past in India.

These tools, along with other evidence of habitation, show that humans have been in South Asia for at least a million years. A wealth of archaeological sites containing lithic artefacts testify to complex regional manifestations of a few major and some other more anomalous cultural traditions. Recent years have seen increased research on the lithic technologies (which remain o central importance from the Palaeolithic to the Iron Age), as well as on site distribution and environmental studies relating to the hunter-gatherer and early agricultural societies of early humans and pre-modern hominids. In their examination of the Acheulean quarry site of Isampur in Karnataka,[3] Michael Petraglia and his co-authors demonstrate how stones were specially selected for specific tools and how a quarry would have been used by people from various sites, who would have travelled to get desirable stone. Meanwhile, the research group led by Shanti Pappu at Attirampakkam has confirmed that it was an open-air quarrying and manufacturing site. Its raw material is largely quartzite from the Allikulli Hills, less than three kilo metres from the site.

The dating at sites is achieved through a variety of means nowadays. No longer can the size of a tool be used to reflect its age, a was the norm for dating improperly excavated tools such as these at the Museum; neither does the smallness of a tool prove that it has been used and resharpened over and over again.[4] Dating prehistoric material in India is very difficult. Research at Attirampakkam, for instance, is reliant on meticulous stratigraphic analysis at controlled excavations, along with comple scientific means of dating bones (especially fossilised teeth), palaeomagnetic measurements as well as direct cosmogenic nuclide isochron ($^{26}Al/^{10}Be$) burial dating.[5]

All the bifacial Palaeolithic tools in this collection are thickest at the centre. Stones would first have been pared down to the appropriate maximum thickness and then would have been flaked outwards from the centre. The shaping of the cutting edge of these tools is highly sophisticated. Their apparent simplicity belies a highly sophisticated craftsmanship, and a profound understanding of the nature and fabric of the type of stone being used.

Many of the tools are from the collection of the archaeologist Sir John Evans.

Objects in the Evans collection came from the collections of the earliest archaeologists and travellers interested in non-European Prehistory, among them Robert Bruce Foote. His findings were variously published and in 1864, shortly after his initial discoveries, they were presented to the Asiatic Society which brought them to prominence.[6] Foote picked up his first tool from the debris on the Brigade Ground at 'Pallavaram' near Madras on 30 May 1863. He later found a number of hand-axes – including one illustrated here – in the nullah bed at Attirampakkam, in Chingleput District near Madras. The greater part of Foote's exhaustive collection is now in the Madras Museum and his first major catalogue of it was published in 1901,[7] followed by other volumes in 1914 and 1916.[8] The Ashmolean has a small collection of Foote's finds, labelled as being discovered at 'Woodecottah', 'Yeuallur, near Maderapaucum', 'Pyanoor, North Arcote', 'Yedhully' and, of course, Attirampakkam itself – the first of the sites he discovered that proved India had a Stone Age past.

These early publications inspired other archaeologists and enthusiasts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to make collections of artefacts from the earliest epochs of Indian history.[9] The collections of Stone Age tools at the Ashmolean also come from Sir John Lubbock (later Lord Avebury) and Augustus Pitt Rivers. Both men were friends of Sir John Evans, prehistorian and father of Sir Arthur Evans, the famous archaeologist and Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum. As mentioned in Chapter 1, a series of stone tools in the Evans collection (including several originally from collectors such as Foote) were transferred at various times to the Pitt Rivers Museum. These collectors also gave pieces to the Natural History Museum, London and to the British Museum.[10]

1 V. N. Mishra, 'The Age of the Acheulian in India: New Evidence', *Current Anthropology* 33, 3, 1992, pp. 325–28. For older general surveys of the earliest phases of Indian archaeology, see H. D. Sankalia, *Prehistory of India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1977; B. Allchin and R. Allchin, *The Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 33–96; and D. K. Chakrabarti, *India: An Archaeological History, Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 74–5. Although they are useful introductions to the geography, variety and extent of sites, the dating provided in these surveys has been updated: see references in note 2 below. On habitation patterns and evidence, see S. Pappu, 'A Study of Natural Site Formation Processes in the Kortallayar Basin, Tamil Nadu, South India', *Geoarchaeology*, vol. 14, issue 2, February 1999, pp. 127–50, which examines natural processes involved in Palaeolithic site formation; see also S. Pappu, 'Middle Palaeolithic Stone Tool Technology in the Kortallayar Basin, South India', *Antiquity* 75 / 287, 2001, pp. 107–17.

2 S. Pappu, et al., 'Early Pleistocene Presence of Acheulian Hominins in South India', *Science*, vol. 331, 25 March 2011, Washington, DC: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2011, pp. 1596–99; M. Petraglia and B. Allchin, 'Human evolution and culture change in the Indian subcontinent', in M.D. Petraglia and B. Allchin eds., *The Evolution and History of Human Populations in South Asia: Inter-disciplinary Studies in Archaeology, Biological Anthropology, Linguistics and Genetics*, Netherlands: Springer Press, 2007, pp. 1–20.

3 M. D. Petraglia, P. LaPorta and K. Paddayya, 'The First Acheulian Quarry in India: Stone Tool Manufacture, Biface Morphology and Behaviors', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 55, 4, 1999, pp. 39–70.

4 M. D. Petraglia, 'The Lower Palaeolithic of India and its Bearing on the Asian Record', in M. D. Petraglia and Ravi Korisettar, eds., *Early Human Behaviour in Global Context: The Rise and Diversity of the Lower Palaeolithic Record*, London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 343–90. See also V. N. Misra, 'Middle Pleistocene Adaptations in India', in O. Soffer, ed., *The Pleistocene Old World: Regional Perspectives*, New York: Plenum Press, 1987, pp. 99–119.

5 For the dating of Attirampakkam, see S. Pappu et. al., *op cit.*, 2011. For the types of objects found there and the archaeology, see S. Pappu et. al., 'Excavations at the Palaeolithic Site of Attirampakkam, South India: Preliminary Findings', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 44, no. 4, (Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research), August–October 2003, pp. 591–8.

6 R. B. Foote, 'Notes on Some Recent Neolithic and Palaeolithic Finds in South India', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 56, 11, 1887, pp. 259–82.

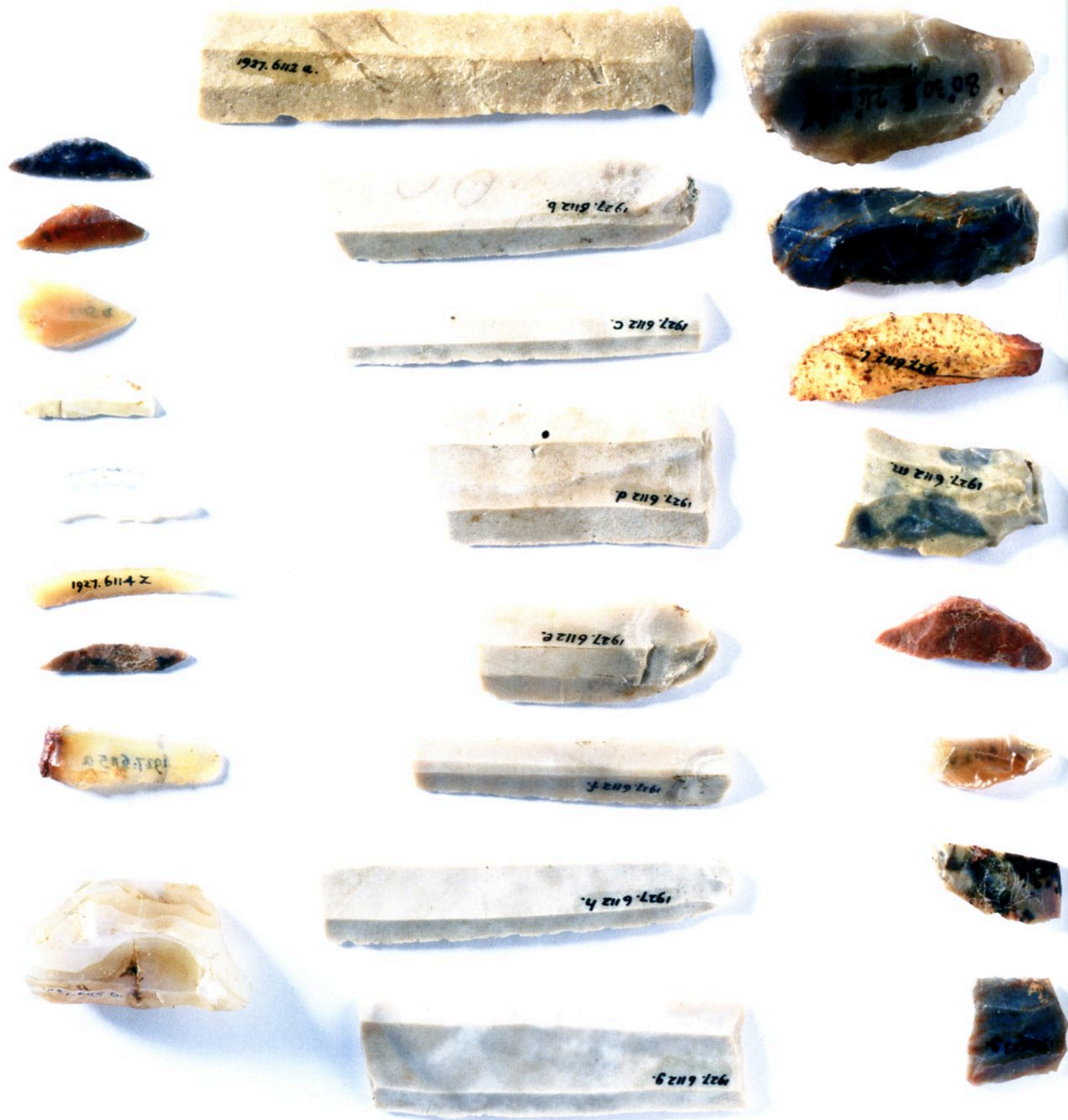
7 R. B. Foote, *Catalogue of the Prehistoric Antiquities*, Madras: Government Press, 1901.

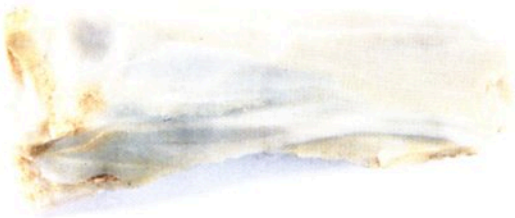
8 R. B. Foote, *The Foote Collection of Indian Prehistoric and Proto-historic Antiquities*, vols. I and II, Madras: Government Press, 1914–16.

9 Although Meadows Taylor had found a polished stone tool as early as 1842 at Lingsugur and others such as LeMesurier and Theobold were also exploring the Narmada and central Indian countryside, Bruce Foote was the first archaeologist to publish his discoveries of the Palaeolithic Age in South India. I am grateful to the Pitt Rivers Museum and the information collected by Sarah Milliken for information on the collectors. Other lists of these collectors can be found, see also S. Pappu, 'Pleistocene Environment and Stone Age Adaptation in the Kortaliar Basin, Tamil Nadu', Ph.D. Dissertation, Pune: University of Poona, 1996, which traces the history of the subject from the first Palaeolithic tool discovered there in 1863.

10 For lists of collectors of Stone Age artefacts active in the Indian subcontinent who made gifts to the British Museum, see J. Cook and H. Martingell, *The Carlyle Collection of Stone Age Artefacts from Central India*, British Museum Occasional Paper 95, Department of Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquities, London: British Museum Press, 1994, pp. 101–13.

2 Microliths – mostly Mesolithic and Neolithic





ILLUSTRATED: (L TO R)

COLUMN 1:
AN1927.6114 (a, b, i, m, p, u, z); AN1927.6115 (a, b)

COLUMN 2:
AN1927.6112 (a–h): blades from the Rohri Hills

COLUMN 3:
AN1927.6112 (j, k, l, m, r, v); AN1927.6113 (a, g)

COLUMN 4:
AN1927.6113 (j, k, m, n, u, v, w, x)

Apart from the larger Stone Age tools, the Ashmolean houses a large collection of microliths and micro-debitage from the collection of Sir John Evans who, in addition to his other interests, collected Indian prehistoric antiquities. A part of this set is formed by what, in all probability, was initially the collection of Archibald Campbell Carlyle (1831–97),[1] an enthusiastic amateur prehistorian who later worked with the Archaeological Survey of India as assistant to its Director, Alexander Cunningham.[2] Carlyle conducted extensive field work between 1871 and 1884, traversing – on foot – most of the north and central Indian plains of the regions then known as Rajputana, Central Provinces, Bundelkhand and the Ganga-Yamuna and Narmada Valleys, as well as Agra. With his formidable knowledge and experience in this field, he worked relentlessly to establish the presence of the Stone Age sites of India.

Carlyle returned to England in 1885. He stayed in London at Grattan Street, Hammersmith, where he began disposing of his formidable collection through his neighbour, the dealer Charles Seidler, former curator of the Nantes Museum.[3] The microliths in the Evans collection may have been purchased from Carlyle through Seidler; it is now impossible to differentiate the objects collected by Carlyle from those Evans might have acquired from other sources, since he amalgamated them into typological groups without keeping records of their provenance. Although only two pieces have been published as forming part of the original Carlyle collection (AN1927.6114, 6115),[4] the Museum in fact houses in excess of one hundred Indian Stone Age objects, and it is likely that the majority originally came from Carlyle.

The find spots of the two mentioned above, however, are recorded; they come from Banda in Bundelkhand and the Vindhya Hills respectively. These are illustrated in row 4, and microliths from related sites can also be seen in rows 1 and 2. The pieces from Banda are from Holocene assemblages, probably attributable to the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. The pieces labelled by Evans as coming from the Vindhya Hills are most probably from the area between Rewa in eastern Madhya Pradesh and Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, where many Upper to Middle and Lower Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic artefacts have also been found.

Carlyle's collections from Morhana Pahar included in excess of 25,000 tools and were scattered in museums across the world. This site is near a cluster of others: Lekhahia, Chopani Mando, Barakachha and Siddhpur. Large numbers of microlithic sites have come to light in central India. D. D. Kosambi[5] noted that the density of microlithic sites near Pune was so concentrated that it was clear the population was too large to support itself by hunting and gathering alone, and so must have practised agriculture as well. Evidence from other areas supports this conclusion. In his excavations at Adamgarh, in the district of Hoshangabad (Madhya Pradesh), R. V. Joshi[6] found that microliths were associated with bones from domesticated and wild animals in nearly equal numbers. These surveys and excavations have dated some of the sites to about 4500 BC.

The group of tools illustrated here (rows 1, 2 and 4) is selected from a large collection to demonstrate the variety of stone used and shapes formed in various parts of the country. As in most microlithic assemblages, there are a number of types of lunates, arrowheads, blades (and their cores) and burins. The Central Indian tools are, typically, made of semi-precious stone. These include various jaspers, agates and

other chalcedonic silica and fine quartzite. Many of these fine microliths derive from pebbles in the Narmada basin. Their large number include many sharp tips for projectiles such as arrows, spears or javelins; arrowheads account for such a high proportion that it is safe to assume that bows and arrows were the main weapons used in this age. Some of the Central Indian rock shelters where such tools have been found are painted with scenes of chariots drawn by horses and bulls and carrying figures with spears, bows and arrows. Although it is tempting to see these vivid illustrations as being contemporary with the age of the tool-makers, dating these paintings is difficult and all corroborative evidence is largely apocryphal.

The microliths found in the Indus system (illustrated in row 3) are all from settled communities, some of which possess a distinctly early urban character. It is thus apparent that these small tools could come from cultures consisting of both hunter-gatherers and early settled peoples. Many more such chert (cryptocrystalline silica) blades, and the cores from which they were cut, come from sites such as Sukkur, Makran and other places in Sindh. They may be viewed as a continuation of Mesolithic technology into the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. The Ashmolean has an impressive collection of these, some of which are illustrated further in this catalogue.

Almost nothing is known about the period between the late interglacial (15,000 BC) and the Neolithic phase at sites such as Mehrgarh in 7000 BC. It is, however, the received wisdom that microlithic tools may belong to this phase. The technique of producing parallel-sided blades from a carefully prepared core is present from the Upper Palaeolithic onwards.[7] One core can quite easily yield many blades. Although the technology of making small tools is present from the Upper Palaeolithic period, the scale of the tools becomes even smaller in the Mesolithic, when they are also more prolific. Mesolithic in India is taken to mean the cultures of a wide range of communities from the beginning of the Holocene, *c.*9000 BC, to the beginning of the Iron Age in approximately 1000 BC (in some places, much later). Although the Mesolithic Age is said to have occurred roughly 10,000 years ago, at the beginning of the Holocene – at the time when hunter-gatherers began to become more sedentary – the evidence from the numerous Mesolithic sites scattered all over India is variable. Small 'Mesolithic' tools are, on the one hand, found to coexist with hunter-gatherers, and on the other hand they are found in later, historical contexts.[8]

In India, in fact, we have evidence that some communities chose to live as hunter-gatherers even in the historical period, contemporary with the many other communities who were in different states of historical development. Hunters in Central India, fishing communities along the coastlines and many nomadic herdsmen scattered all over the country for instance, had all been in contact with the settled cultures of the early and even mature Indus peoples and yet continued to thrive, while leading perhaps marginalised lives. Microliths are not always indicative of the presence of a Mesolithic Age that pre-dates settled agriculture, but they may indicate that Mesolithic cultures coexisted with agricultural communities.

1 Carlyle was curiously also spelt as 'Carleylle' in his publication *Report of Tours in Gorakpur and Ghazipur, Archaeological Survey Report* XXII, 1885. See the discussion in G. de G. Sieveking, 'Morhana Pahar: Or the Mystery of A. C. Carlyle', *Man*, vol. 60, Jul. 1960, pp. 98–100.

2 Cook and Martingell 1994, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–6.

3 Cook and Martingell 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

4 Cook and Martingell 1994, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

5 D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965 (also published as *Ancient India*, 1966), Chapter 2.3, p. 127.

6 R. V. Joshi. 'Microliths from Adamgarh Rock Shelters (Madhya Pradesh)', in *Satabda-Kaumudi*, Nagpur: Central Museum, 1964, pp. 114–16; R. V. Joshi, 'Acheulian Succession in Central India', in *Asian Perspectives*, Summer 1964, 8, 1, pp. 150–63.

7 Blades and flakes are recorded from several Upper Palaeolithic sites. For more recent comparative studies, see S. A. Sali, 'The Upper Palaeolithic at Patne, District Jalagaon, Maharashtra', pp. 137–45, and V. Jayaswal, 'Hunter-Gatherers of the Terminal Pleistocene in Uttar Pradesh', in *World at 18000 B.P. 2: Lower Latitudes*, C. Gamble and O. Soffer, eds., London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 237–54. For a comparison with other sites, see L. S. Leshnik's examination of the sites of Bagor and Tilwara in his 'Prehistoric exploration in north Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan', *East and West*, n.s., vol. 18, 1968, p. 309.

8 The few available dates established so far provide a very wide time frame for the Mesolithic. These dates range from 23,000 BC for the Upper Palaeolithic phase at Belan to approximately 8000–7000 BC for the mature Mesolithic phases at Sarai Nahar Rai (see G. R. Sharma and B. B. Misra, *Excavations at Chopani Mando 1977–79: A Neolithic Settlement in the Belan Valley*, Archaeology of the Vindhyas and the Ganga Valley 5, University of Allahabad: Allahabad, 1980, pp. 14–16, 36–37; and G. R. Sharma and D. Mandal, *Excavations at Mahagara 1977–78: A Neolithic Settlement in the Belan Valley*, Archaeology of the Vindhyas and the Ganga Valley 6, G. R. Sharma, ed., Allahabad: University of Allahabad, 1980, p. 72. This is discussed further in relation to the dates for microlithic blades and cores from the Rohri Hills, Sindh (cat. 10).

3 Stone axes, mainly Late Neolithic, polished and unpolished

Central, Eastern and Peninsular India

3.15 NINE SMALL AXE HEADS
Various kinds of stone
Eastern India
Largest: 8 cm in length
EAX.7425 (a–i)

3.1 AXE
Stone
Central India
L. 18 cm
AN1927.6136
From the Evans collection (Evans label: 1865)

3.2 AXE
Stone
Central India
L. 10 cm
AN1927.6137
From the Evans collection (Evans label: 1865)

3.3 AXE
Stone
'Bunder, Bundelcund, United Provinces' [*sic*]
L. 9.5 cm
EAPr.50
Gift of Sir Heywood W. Seton-Karr, 1905

3.4 AXE
Stone
'Bundelcund' [*sic*]
L. 8 cm
AN1927.6146
From the Evans collection (Evans label: A. W. Franks, 1877)

3.5 AXE
Stone
India, site unspecified
L. 12 cm
AN1968.933
Gift of Sir Martin Dillon, KCB

3.6 AXE
Polished stone
India, site unspecified
L. 11.7 cm
AN1878.138
Label: no. 177
Gift of Revd. Dr Jarbo (Her Majesty's Bengal Ecclesiastical Establishment, 1878)

3.7 AXE
Stone
India, site unspecified
L. 12 cm
EA1878.136

3.15A

3.15B

3.15C

3.15D

3.15E

3.15F

3.15G

3.15H

3.15I

Label: Chipped black stone celt with ground cutting edge from India. Gift of Revd. Dr Jarbo (Her Majesty's Bengal Ecclesiastical Establishment, 1878)

3.8 AXE
Stone
India, site unspecified
L. 8 cm
EA1958.571

3.9 AXE
Stone
Site unspecified
L. 10 cm
AN1968.934
Gift of Sir Martin Dillon, KCB, 1888

3.10 AXE
Ground stone
Site unspecified
L. 13 cm
AN1878. 137
Gift of Revd. Dr Jarbo (Her Majesty's Bengal Ecclesiastical Establishment, 1878)

3.11 AXE
Stone
Bellary area, Karnataka
L. 12 cm
AN1927.6141
Evans label: found near Bellary (in old Madras Presidency) by Mr H. Gompertz, 1886

3.12 AXE
Stone
Bellary area, Karnataka
L. 9.5 cm
AN1927.6143
Evans label: found near Bellary (in old Madras Presidency) by Mr H. Gompertz, 1886

3.13 AXE
Stone
Bellary area, Karnataka
L. 7 cm
AN1927.6138
Evans label: found near Bellary (in old Madras Presidency) by Mr H. Gompertz, 1886

3.14 AXE
Stone
Bellary area, Karnataka
L. 10 cm
AN1927.6139
Evans label: found near Bellary (in old Madras Presidency) by Mr H. Gompertz, 1886

3.1

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Polished stone tools are usually considered to be characteristic of the Neolithic Age. They have been found at a large number of sites in Central, Eastern and Peninsular India. Older typological studies separate the stone tools of this period into two broad categories, both of which can be seen here. Cats. 3.5, 3.9, 3.10 and the nine tools in Cat. 3.15 (previous page) are from Eastern India. They are generally smaller and lighter than the others, with triangular and rounded outlines. In the northeastern states shouldered or tanged axes are found (as illustrated in 2); they are made of a distinctive greenstone diorite separate from shale, sandstone and jadeite. These axes are distinct from the southern and western ones (cats. 3.1–3.4, 3.6–3.9 and 3.11–3.14), which are heavier, lenticular in section and triangular in outline. The axes in the collection from Bellary in Karnataka (cats. 3.11–3.14) belong to this group. They come from sites that may be dated as late as 3000 BC, contemporary with Protohistoric cultures widely found in the subcontinent at this date. Importantly, sites in this region have been associated with ash mounds, the sites of Neolithic cattle pens that had been burnt down. These early settlers were thus certainly dependant on animal husbandry and, perhaps to a lesser extent, on the cultivation of crops.

Greater context is available elsewhere, at Mehrgarh I in Baluchistan, for instance, where objects were found in multi-roomed, rectangular mudbrick dwellings widely separated from one another, with numerous human burials in the ample intervening spaces. Impression of barley and wheat in the mud make it clear that the community was agricultural One can see that the processes of Neolithi evolution in India appears to occur almos simultaneously in the Baluchistan area of the lower Indus and the Ganga and Vindhyan area in about the seventh to the sixth millennia BC. The major difference seems to be that ceramic assemblages in

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3.8

3.9

3.10

3.13

3.14

the extended Ganga Valley antedate those in Baluchistan.

The approximate dates thus assumed for most Neolithic sites are 7000–4500 BC, while some degree of extension on either side is to be expected. Yet the Bellary tools here may be as late as 3000 BC, while the shapes of some of these polished tools are not entirely dissimilar to Protohistoric Neolithic stone finds at sites such as Burzahom in the Kashmir Valley, considered to be contemporary with the early Harappan (i.e. 2950–1700 BC). The dates for tools of this type from Swat are similar.

Dating the distinctive tools from the surface collections from the hills (and valleys) of the northeast, particularly Assam, is especially difficult. They are comparable in shape to those from Southeast Asia and southern China. At sites such as Sarutaru (District Kamrup), Daojali-Hading in the North Chachar Hills of Assam and at Selbalgiri in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, these distinct shouldered axes have been found with cord – or basket-marked handmade pottery.[1]

1 For a summary of the pottery types from these sites, see the entry by T. C. Sharma in A. Ghosh, *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, vol. I, Subjects, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, pp. 225–27; see also Sharma's entry on the stone tools from these regions, pp. 58–60. One of the earliest collections of Neolithic tools from the Northeast made by G. D. Walker, ICS, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District, in 1931, as well as those collected by J. P. Mills in 1937, are housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum. These collections formed the basis of our understanding of the prehistory of the Northeast (see A. H. Dani, *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960). It is likely that the Ashmolean's collection of Northeastern tools was made at a similar time and perhaps may come from the same collections.

4 Pounders and grinders of uncertain date

India, variously datable, circa 2000 BC

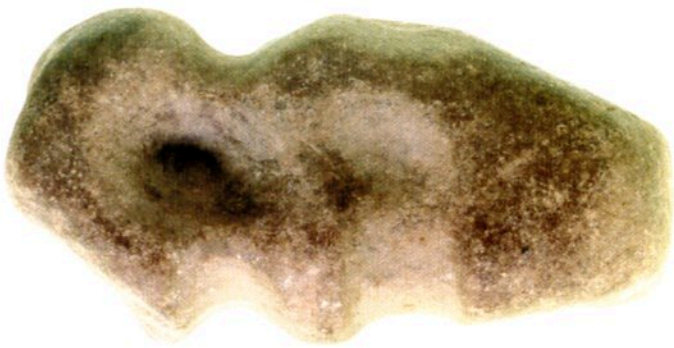
4.1 HAMMER
Stone
Provenance unknown
L. 12 cm
AN1927.3157
From the collection of Sir Heywood W. Seton-Karr

4.2 HAMMER
Stone
Provenance unknown
L. 8 cm
AN1927.3157
From the collection of Sir Heywood W. Seton-Karr

4.3 GRINDER
Stone
Provenance unknown
L. 8.5, H. 9, D. 6 cm
EA2013.119
Bequest of Douglas and Mary Barrett

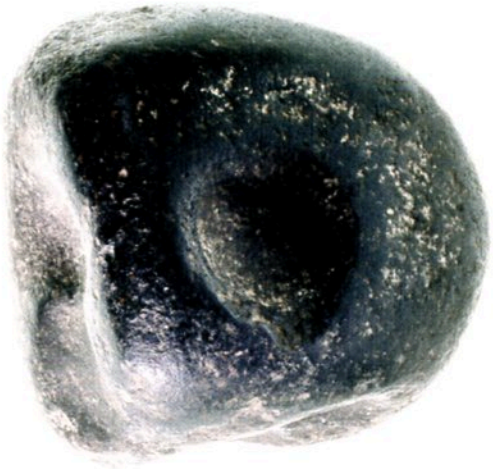
Over 600 objects from the Seton-Karr collection are in the Pitt Rivers Museum. Although the larger part of his collection (some of which is housed at the Field Museum, Chicago) was Egyptian, during the time he spent serving in the army Seton-Karr was an avid traveller, archaeologist and hunter. He amassed his collection in the course of his travels in India, Africa and America.

Dating such tools of rubbed and rounded form, with multiple grooves for a secure grip, is particularly difficult. They do not come from securely recorded sites or excavations. However, their highly rubbed down appearance and utilitarian form indicate that they have been much used. The grooves and indentations in the stones are superbly wrought, enabling them to fit comfortably in the palm. The form of the tools indicates that they may have been used as grinders, hammers and rubbers.



4.1

4.2



4.3

5 Polished stone tools of uncertain date

5.1

5.2

5.3

5.1 AXE
Stone
Provenance unknown
L. 10.1 cm
EA2013.118
Bequest of Douglas and Mary Barrett

5.2 AXE
Stone
Provenance unknown
L. 12.6 cm
EAX.7428

5.3 AXE
Stone
Provenance unknown, but most likely collected in Calcutta
L. 13 cm
EA1984.1 (previously Antiquities: AN1878.36)
Gift of Revd. Dr P. Jarbo

This group of highly polished and burnished stone tools is part of a distinct South Asian tradition of tool technology. It has been recorded in several areas including Brahmagiri in the Deccan, Eastern India and in the broader Indus regions. These highly polished stone tools with sharp edges are clearly based on metal prototypes, and thus cannot be earlier than the Chalcolithic period. They occur alongside unpolished coarse tools in Swat;[1] here they have a long-standing history, with evidence of use until 1650 BC at Loebnar and Bir kot Ghwandai. Such polished stone tools may, then, be tools of communities who did not have access to, or could not afford, the metal ones to which they had obviously been exposed. They also demonstrate that divisions between the Stone, Bronze, Copper and Iron Ages are not always chronological.

1 Giorgio Stacul, *Prehistoric and Protohistoric Swat, Pakistan (c. 3000–1400 BC)*, Reports and memoires, Rome: ISMEO, 20, 1989, figs. 40a–d, pl. 32, p. 90.

6 Group of terracotta sherds

Variously dateable to between 4500 and 3000 BC
Loralai Valley
ANI954.411

ILLUSTRATED: A small selection from a group of 68 (top to bottom):

6.1 EAI952.411 (2)

6.2 EAI952.411 (3)

6.3 EAI952.411 (5)

6.4 EAI952.411 (45)

6.5 EAI952.411 (53)

6.6 EAI952.411 (54)

6.7 EAI952.411 (58)

Baluchistan and eastern Afghanistan (the Indo–Iranian borderlands) are archaeologically fascinating areas. The three river valleys of the region, of the Quetta, the Loralai and the Zhob, share many cultural traits. They are climatically harsh, characterised by very hot summers and cold winters with long periods of snowfall in the higher valleys; barring the river water from melting snows, there is very little water as the rainfall is low. Settlements in these areas tend to consist of small communities of pastoral nomads. That these river valleys were part of a united cultural phase is demonstrated by the commonalities in their surviving archaeological record.

The museum has a wide range of sherds that are representative of the pottery types of prominent late Neolithic to Chalcolithic sites (such as Rana Ghundai, Periano Ghundai and Sur Jangal) in the Loralai Valley of Baluchistan. They are usually well made and often carefully painted in a wide variety of sophisticated patterns. The ware ranges from buff to orange, and at times to a dark orange veering towards rust. It is decorated with painting in distinct black and white pigments.

Cat. 6.1 is identical to a type catalogued by Fairservis as Jangal Painted Ware, named after the site of Sur Jangal in the Loralai Valley of northern Baluchistan.[1] A similar black on buff design is also recorded at Rana Ghundai. Cats. 6.2 and 6.3 compare closely with a type recorded by Stein,[2] Ross[3] and Fairservis[4] as coming from Rana Ghundai. Similarly, most of the Museum's sherds from Rana Ghundai and its environs match the nature of assemblages recorded by Fairservis in his Phase D – nearly 40 feet (12.2 m) below the surface of the top of the mound at Rana Ghundai, where he excavated a trench in the 1950s. Rana Ghundai had been previously excavated in the late 1930s, when an extensive sequence was revealed by Brigadier Ross. Sur Jangal, in the same area, was first excavated by Sir Marc Aurel Stein in 1927.

The findings from the Loralai Valley are comparable to those from the central Baluchistan excavations of Beatrice di Cardi at Anjira (in 1948 and 1957) and those from J.-M. Casal's excavations (from 1951–58) at Mundigak in southeastern Afghanistan. All of these sites show a similar consistency in the progression of their settlement patterns and in the nature of their archaeological assemblages, and their pottery traditions would appear to date to the fourth millennium BC.

1 W. Fairservis, 'Archaeological Surveys in the Zhob and Loralai Districts', *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 47, 2, 1959, pp. 391–2, designs 64, 80.
2 M. Aurel Stein, 'An Archaeological Tour in Waziristan and Northern Baluchistan', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* 37, Calcutta, 1929 (reprint 1998), Rana Ghundai 25, pl. 12; see also RG 4, pls. 10–11.
3 Brig. E. J. Ross, 'A Chalcolithic Site in Northern Baluchistan', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1946, pp. 284 – 316, pl. 10 (6).
4 Fairservis 1959, *op. cit.*, p. 373, fig. 71 (i).

7 Group of terracotta sherds

Variously dateable to between 4500 and 3000 BC
All probably from Rana Ghundai in the Loralai Valley
EA1952.411a

ILLUSTRATED: clockwise, starting with the large sherd:

7.1 EA1952.411A (1)

7.2 EA1952.411A (26)

7.3 EA1952.411A (32)

7.4 EA1952.411A (49)

7.5 EA1952.411A (18)

7.6 EA1952.411A (35)

7.7 EA1952.411A (7)

In addition to having been found at Rana Ghundai, the vessel featured as Cat. 7.1 is represented at Bannu[1] and at various sites in the Gomal Valley which lie between these two major sites. These round-bottomed pots have smooth, painted shoulders while the surface of the rounded lower half of the pot is left characteristically coarse – no doubt to sit securely in the domestic hearths which are found from the earliest period of habitation in this area.

Cats. 7.6 and 7.7 represent open vessels – that is, vessels that display the painted interior or cavetto of bowls. The design is painted with a characteristic brushstroke widely documented in the Loralai Valley.[2] Sherds illustrated as Cats 7.4 and 7.5 are painted with a popular design featuring deer with large stylised antlers,[3] a design that continued well into the mature Indus phase.[4] This is of course distinct from the widespread emphasis given to the long curving horns that were often depicted on the heads of figures in human form, prompting scholars to speculate on the importance of horned 'deities' and on the ritualistic possession of horns in Protohistoric times. The design on Cat. 7.3 is probably a variant of those on Cats. 7.4 and 7.5, where the antlers have been stylised into very tall sweeping brushstrokes creating a diagonal pattern on the pot.[5]

1 See F. Khan, J. R. Knox and K. D. Thomas, *Explorations and Excavations in Bannu District, Northwest Frontier Province, Pakistan 1985–1988*, British Museum Occasional Paper no. 80, London: British Museum, Department of Oriental Antiquities, 1991, pp. 111–13, where it is called the SKT 'B' Ware and Jhandi Babar 'A' in the Gomal Valley.

2 See e.g. Fairservis 1959, *op. cit.*, designs 349–54 from Rana Ghundai and Sur Jangal; see also Aurel Stein 1929, *op. cit.*, pl. 13, RG 7 and RG 1.

3 Compare Brig. E. J. Ross 1946, *op. cit.*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1946, pl. 9 (1–3) and pl. 12; Fairservis 1959, *op. cit.*, designs 141, 144–6 which he calls 'Jangal Painted Variant 2' and records as being found in both Rana Ghundai and Sur Jangal; Aurel Stein 1929, *op. cit.*, found similar sherds at Rana Ghundai, pl. 13, RG 8, RG 3.

4 See for example J. Marshall, *Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization: Being an Official Account of Archaeological Excavations at Mohenjo-daro Carried out by the Government of India Between the Years 1922 and 1927*, 3 vols., London: A. Probsthain, 1931 (reprint: Indological Book House: Delhi, 1973), vol. 3, pl. 89, no. 3.

5 Compare for example Fairservis 1959, *op. cit.*, designs 151, 151a ('Jangal Painted Variant 2').

8 Group of terracotta sherds

Variously dateable to between 4500 and 3000 BC
All probably from Rana Ghundai in the Loralai Valley
EA1952.411

ILLUSTRATED: (L to R, top to bottom)

8.1 EA1952.411 (35)

8.2 EA1952.411 (24)

8.3 EA1952.411 (22)

8.4 EA1952.411 (21)

This subgroup of sherds from Rana Ghundai includes varieties of polychrome painted wares. Cats 8.1, 8.2 and 8.4 show portions of the same pattern, which has been called the 'Rana Ghundai Red on Red Slip',[1] from different pots. Concentric squares in alternating colours of red and black are painted on a red to orange body. These are interspersed with a black chequerboard pattern (which may originally have derived from basket weaving). The alternating ochre and black wavy lines seen in Cat. 8.3 are often found on the shoulders of pots.[2]

1 Fairservis 1959, *op. cit.*, designs 384–97.
2 Aurel Stein 1929, *op. cit.*, pl. RG20; Fairservis 1959 *op. cit.*, designs 408–9.

9 Three pots

9.2

Approximately 3000 BC
Nal, Baluchistan

9.1 SHORT JAR WITH EVERTED VERTICAL WALLS AND SHARPLY INVERTED SHOULDER
Cream to off-white terracotta with red ochre brushwork
H. 9.2 cm, diam. 15.4 cm
AN1945.4

9.2 OVOID POT
Off-white to buff terracotta with polychrome
H. 8.5 cm, diam. of lip 9.5 cm
AN1945.5

9.3 BOWL WITH EVERTED STRAIGHT WALLS
Buff terracotta with polychrome
H. 9.2 cm, diam. of lip 12.5 cm
AN1945.6

Polychrome Nal funerary pottery is one of the most distinctive and attractive prehistoric ceramic wares of the subcontinent. It is a buff ware, sometimes slightly pink, painted in black or dark grey over the natural surface or slip of the vessel. The surface is further embellished by the application of red, blue or yellow pigment and the repetition of motifs. Nal stands out among all prehistoric wares for its use of the yellow, green and blue pigments. Popular motifs include naturalistic representations of fish and ibex.

Like its colour, the shapes of the pottery are distinctive: narrow-mouthed, ovoid forms with a disc base (usually Period II or III); narrow-mouthed, carinated forms with disc shape; almost straight-walled (flanged slightly outwards) jars with disc base (Period II); disc-based open bowls; a carinated form with inward-turning upper body and a flat-bottomed canister with round and straight-edged mouth (Period II). The foot of a Nal pot, as shown in two examples here, is turned and usually meticulously finished.

The three pots illustrated here are typical of Period II. Cats. 9.1 and 9.2 both have a similar band of omega-like motifs running across the main field. This, along with bands divided with diagonal lines into triangles, or with semi-circles, make up the most commonly found patterns on Nal pots. Commonly recorded also is the elaborate geometric pattern seen on Cat. 9.3, comprising a central hexagonal medallion surrounded by various borders and circular bosses radiating on each side of the hexagon. Importantly, these bosses are raised and were obviously applied on to the wet pot before it was fired. Ornamental though it is, this design probably also imitates metal prototypes. Like so much pottery history, Nal unwittingly preserves, embedded in its forms and motifs, evidence for a sophisticated metal-working, mining and smelting technology.

The village of Nal, where this pottery type was first identified, is a major pre-Harappan site, located about 40 km west of Khuzdar in Jhalawan, in the Las Bela region of Baluchistan. It lies on an important

9.3

communication point between north and south Baluchistan, on the main route from the Makran coast towards the north. Nal used to be thought of as a single period site, but recent excavations have shown this may not be the case. The 'Nal culture' seems to have been a critical final stage before mature Bronze Age cities developed. In 1996 the Joint German–Pakistani Archaeological Mission reopened research in southeastern Baluchistan, leading to the discovery and documentation of about 300 sites dated to between 4300 and 500 BC. This extensive network of sites within the region, and its wider links with equally large numbers of sites to the north in the Northwest Frontier and eastward on the borders with Iran, have completely altered our perception of the origins of urbanisation and settlement patterns in South Asia. Interestingly, the sites indicate that a development from village to town and then a reduction to camps took place: a civilisational expansion to agriculture followed by migratory pastoralism.

Adam Buthi is an example of one of the earliest sites discovered in southeastern Baluchistan. It was occupied around the mid-fourth millennium BC and abandoned around 3000 BC, well before the height of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation. None of the distinctive types of 'Nal' pottery were found there. However, pots that are partly handmade, partly finished on a slow wheel with shapes and a shiny red to violet slip, resemble Kile Ghul Mohammad pottery from northern Baluchistan – and at times, even some of the wares discussed in the previous pages of this catalogue that come from Loralai.

Niai Buthi is a most impressive early third millennium BC site in the plain of Las Bela.[1] It is related to Sohr Damb (literally Red Mound), the first major site to be discovered with this ware in 1903, located about 7 km to the east of Nal. Excavations until 2001 at this and related sites had presented a reliable sequence of pottery types associated with specific periods. Four cultural periods were identified, of which Period II yielded classic Nal pottery. However with dramatic discoveries in the face of expanding urbanisation in Baluchistan in the past ten to fifteen years, the dating of the wares remains a subject of debate, with dates between *c.*4000–2500 BC being the usual range.

With the beginning of Period II at Nal, from where the pots in the Museum's collection came, many changes become evident in the material culture of the site. The few burials found showed a shift toward complete individual inhumations, as opposed to secondary burials with fractions of up to 16 skeletons in a single chamber as seen in the previous Period. The Nal style pottery starts to reveal a large spectrum of shapes and decorations, including common or domestic wares, polychrome decorations and elaborate figurative designs. The houses become more elaborate, comprising small rooms; many have been found with basins containing husks, storage jars, bone and stone tools for food preparation. Some of the houses were found to contain bull figurines and beads. The miscellaneous cultural material from the deposit at Nal itself included copper adzes, saws, chisels, knives, lead slag, a quartzite celt, limestone grinding stone, cattle figurines, bone discs and a large number of beads in crystal,

9.1

agate, carnelian and lapis lazuli. Some curious silver objects were also excavated, which, strangely, have attracted scant scholarly attention.[2]

Sherds of Nal pottery first came to light in 1903 when Mirza Sher Mohammad, a member of the gazetteer staff compiling the District Gazetteers of Baluchistan, excavated the mound of Sohr Damb and recovered more than 50 vessels. When Hughes Buller, the compiler of the Gazetteers, discussed this pottery with Sir John Marshall, the Director-General of Archaeology, the latter rightly guessed that the Nal ceramics had the potential to push back the then existing chronology of Baluchistan. However, Marshall was wrong in identifying it as a kind of pottery that combined decadent Mycenaean technique and design with purely Asiatic influences, similar to that found in Cyprus and Phoenicia around the eighth century BC. Although Marshall was not successful in getting Marc Aurel Stein, the Archaeological Surveyor of the North-Western Frontier Province and Baluchistan, to excavate Nal in 1904, the discovered pottery was discussed in that year's *Annual Report* of the Survey (1904–5). More pottery continued to be recovered from Nal in 1908 and 1923–24, leading to the systematic excavation of the mound in 1925 by Harold Hargreaves, the Superintendent of the Frontier Circle. By this time Mohenjodaro and Harappa, the two pre-eminent cities of the Harappan civilisation, had been discovered, and Marshall sensed that it was important to ascertain the relationship of the Nal pottery with the Indus region.[3]

Excavations of sites dating to the early third millennium BC, such as Balakot, were conducted in the 1970s by George Dales. He dated the Nal cemetery to the first half of the third millennium BC by virtue of comparisons of the associated wheel-turned pottery shapes and polychrome decoration with those in Mundigak III.[4] Pottery vessels of Nal type occurred in 1975 in Shahr-i Sokhta (Seistan/Turan) in the northern part of the cemetery there.[5] Marcello Piperno, the excavator, assigned them to Phase 4 of Period III, which he dated to *c.*2450–2300 BC – largely on the evidence from radiocarbon, later than the other suggested datings for the Nal cemetery and its pottery.[6]

Most sites in northern and central Baluchistan were abandoned around 2600 BC. This development is probably related to the expansion of the Indus Civilisation. Southern Baluchistan, however, continued to be inhabited by a people labelled 'Kulli'. This cultural complex is named after a site in Kolwa which was discovered by Aurel Stein. Since then several other sites became known, from Makran to southern Kalat, to Nausharo in the Kachhi plain and to the eastern foot of the Kirthar Range in southwestern Sindh. Some motifs and vessel shapes found in southeastern Iran and on the Arabian Peninsula are sometimes also linked to the Kulli and seen as indications of long-distance contacts.

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1 W. Fairservis, *The Roots of Ancient India: The Archaeology of Early Indian Civilization*, London: Macmillan/Allen & Unwin, 1971, pp. 189–94. It occurred beneath a layer of the Kulli Culture (Per. 2). Radiocarbon assay for the latter: P-478, 14C age: 2065±110 BC, MASCA calib.: 2320–2090 BC.

2 See Paul Yule, 'Silver Grave Goods from the Sohr Damb Near Nal, Pakistan', accessed online (16 July 2008) at: http://www.zaw.uni-heidelberg.de/hps/ufg/forschung/yule3/yule3.htm.

3 For the circumstances and history of these discoveries, see N. Lahiri, *Finding Forgotten Cities: How the Indus Civilization was Discovered*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005; D. K. Chakrabarti: *The Oxford Companion to Indian Archaeology: The Archaeological Foundations of Ancient India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006; and G. L. Possehl, *Indus Age: The Beginnings*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, and New Delhi and Calcutta: Oxford University Press and IBH Publishing, 1999.

4 G. F. Dales, 'A suggested chronology for Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the Indus Valley', in R. W. Ehrich, ed., *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965, p. 265.

5 M. Piperno, 'Socio-economic Implications from the Graveyard of Shahr-i Sokhta', in *South Asian Archaeology 1977* (SAA 1977), Naples, 1979, pp. 124–5, graves 55, 58, 62, 64–69.

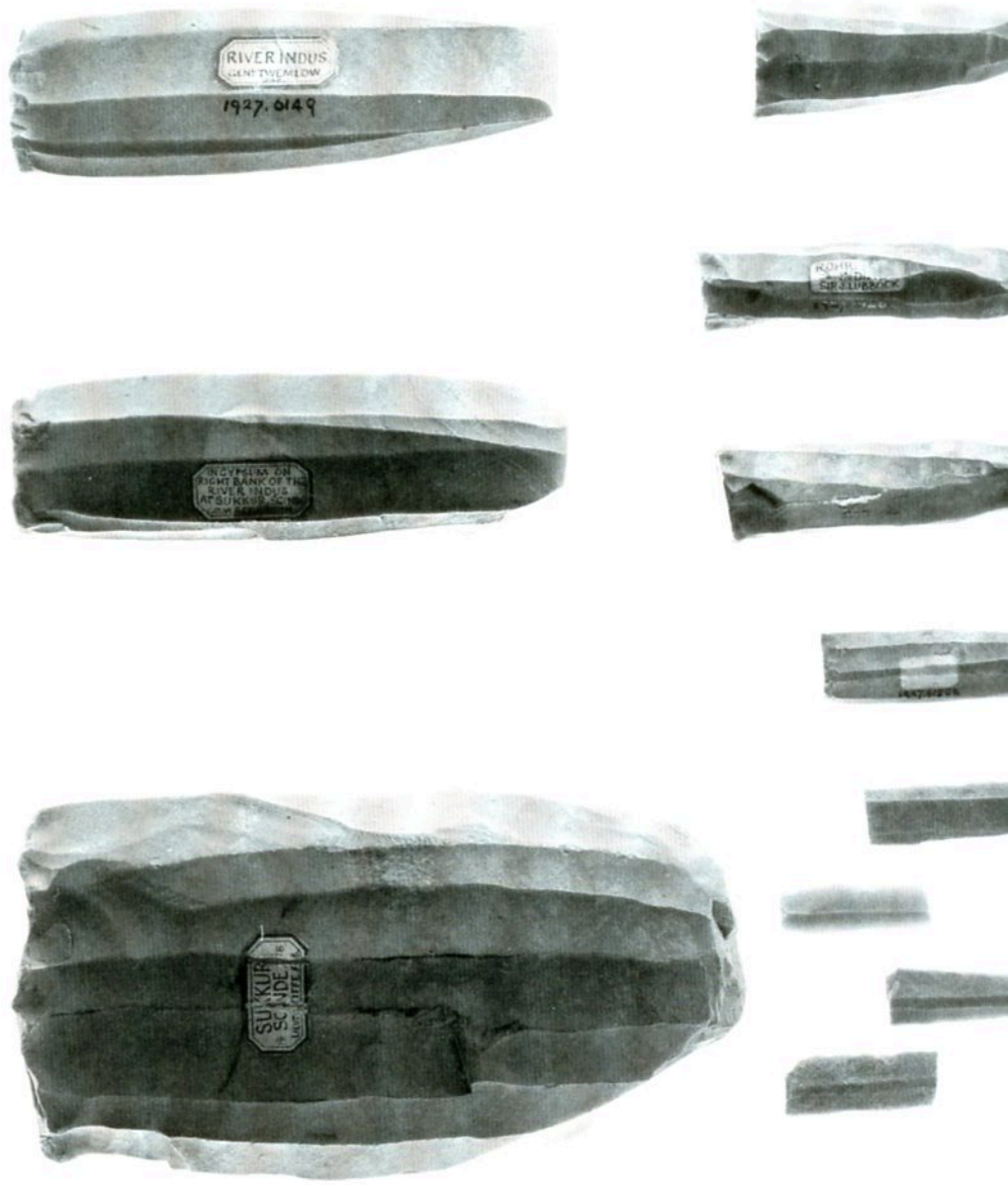
6 For discussions on the dating, see U. Franke-Vogt, 'The Archaeology of Southeastern Balochistan', Internet Publication with 130 Photos, 2000 (accessed 28 April 2011), http://www.harappa.com/baluch; U. Franke-Vogt, 'Excavations at Sohr Damb / Nal in 2002', in U. Franke-Vogt and J. Weisshaar, eds., *South Asian Archaeology 2003*, Forschungen zur Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen, Band 1, Aachen, 2005, pp. 59–72; J. Goersdorf, 'Radiocarbon Dates from Sohr Damb / Nal, Balochistan', in U. Franke-Vogt and J. Weisshaar 2005, *op. cit.*, pp. 77–80.

10 Blades and cores

Chert
Various sizes
Mostly *c.*4000–2500 BC
Makran, Sukkur, Rohri Hills and Mohenjodaro
AN1878.12–19, AN1927.6112a–h (from the Evans collection from Baluchistan),
AN1927.6148a–c, AN1927.6149, AN1927.6150a–d,
ANNC.253a–c, EAMd.5 (multiple)

LEFT COLUMN: (from top):
AN1927.6149, L. 11, W. 4 cm
AN1927.6150d, L. 10.5, W. 3.5 cm
AN1927.6150c, L. 13.5, W 8 cm

RIGHT COLUMN: (from top)
ANNC.253c, L. 6.2, W. 2.5 cm
AN1927.6148c, L. 7.5, W. 2 cm
AN1878.18, L. 7.5, W. 2.5 cm
AN1927.6150a
EAMd.5a-d, L. 4.5, 3.3, 4.5, 3.4 cm



Only seven cores and four blades are illustrated here from the Museum's large holdings of these objects. These cryptocrystalline silica or chert blades and the cores from which they were flaked are widely found in Baluchistan, Sindh and Kutch. Finding large cores such as these is rare. Many blades however, have been found at the extraordinary settlement of Mehrgarh, on the lowlands of the Bolan Pass in Baluchistan. While those may be dated to about 4000 BC, at some sites in Rajasthan and upper Maharashtra blades can be found mixed with material that is older, dated as early as the Upper Palaeolithic. They occur at numerous Mesolithic sites, and at Mehrgarh are mixed with material from the Neolithic.[1] Most commonly, however, like the examples illustrated here, they come from the early Protohistoric phases of the Indus cultures.[2]

The widespread distribution of these tools, the stone for which was quarried in the Rohri Hills, is evidence for one of the earliest organised industries and for trade in the western parts of the Indian subcontinent. It also demonstrates the tenacity of this industry, which spanned an extraordinarily broad timeframe that carried on well into the Harappan period, at sites dated to *c.*2200 BC.

The greater proportion of these artefacts from the Rohri Hills come from Sukkur district, Sindh, and are from the collection of John Lubbock (Lord Avebury). While the Ashmolean houses most of his collection, a small number of objects are also found at the British Museum.

1 The stone cores and blades of the Rohri Hills type are reported by Asthana to be dateable to the Neolithic era, that is, the aceramic phase of Mehrgarh Period I – which dates to the seventh and sixth millennia BC. See S. Asthana, *Pre-Harappan Cultures of India and the Borderlands*, New Delhi: Books & Books, 1985, pp. 47–51, fig. 2.7. Also see a discussion on dating these objects in this catalogue, Cat. 2.

2 Rohri Hills type cores and blades excavated at Mohenjodaro are illustrated in Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pl. 31, nos. 1–16.

11 Five seals and sealings

11.1

*c.*2450–1900 BC
Harappan culture

11.1 TRIANGULAR PRISM SEALING
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro
*c.*2000 BC
W. 3.9 cm
EAMd.13
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

PUBLISHED: D. M. Srinivasan, 'The So-called Proto-Siva Seal from Mohenjo-daro: An Iconological Assessment', *Archives of Asian Art* 29, 1975–6, pp. 55–56, figs. 13–15; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 1; A. Parpola, *Deciphering The Indus Script*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 186, figs. 10–11; A. Parpola, ed., *Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions: Collections Outside India and Pakistan*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeaka, 2010, no. 2826, p.109.

11.2 SQUARE SEAL WITH A BOVID IN PROFILE
Glazed steatite
Said to be from Harappa
*c.*2000 BC
H. 2.3, W. 2.3 cm
EA2009.6 (formerly AN1956.1000)
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities (purchased from Revd Cuthbert King)

PUBLISHED: Buchanan, Briggs and P. R. S. Moorey, eds., *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum, Vol. 11: The prehistoric Stamp Seals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, no. 234, pl. XV.

11.3 SEAL WITH A BOVID IN PROFILE
Glazed steatite
Said to be from Harappa
*c.*2000 BC
h. *c.*2.2 cm, w. *c.*2.3 cm
EA2009.7 (formerly AN1956.1001)
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities (purchased from Revd Cuthbert King)

PUBLISHED: Buchanan, Briggs and P. R. S. Moorey eds., *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum, Vol. 11: The prehistoric Stamp Seals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, no. 235, pl. XV

11.4 SQUARE SEAL WITH A BOVINE IN PROFILE
Glazed steatite
Excavated at Kish, in Iraq: from trench c-9,5(5) on Tell Inghorra, *c.*2000 BC
H. 2.3, W. 2.3 cm
EA1931.119 (formerly AN1931.119)
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities

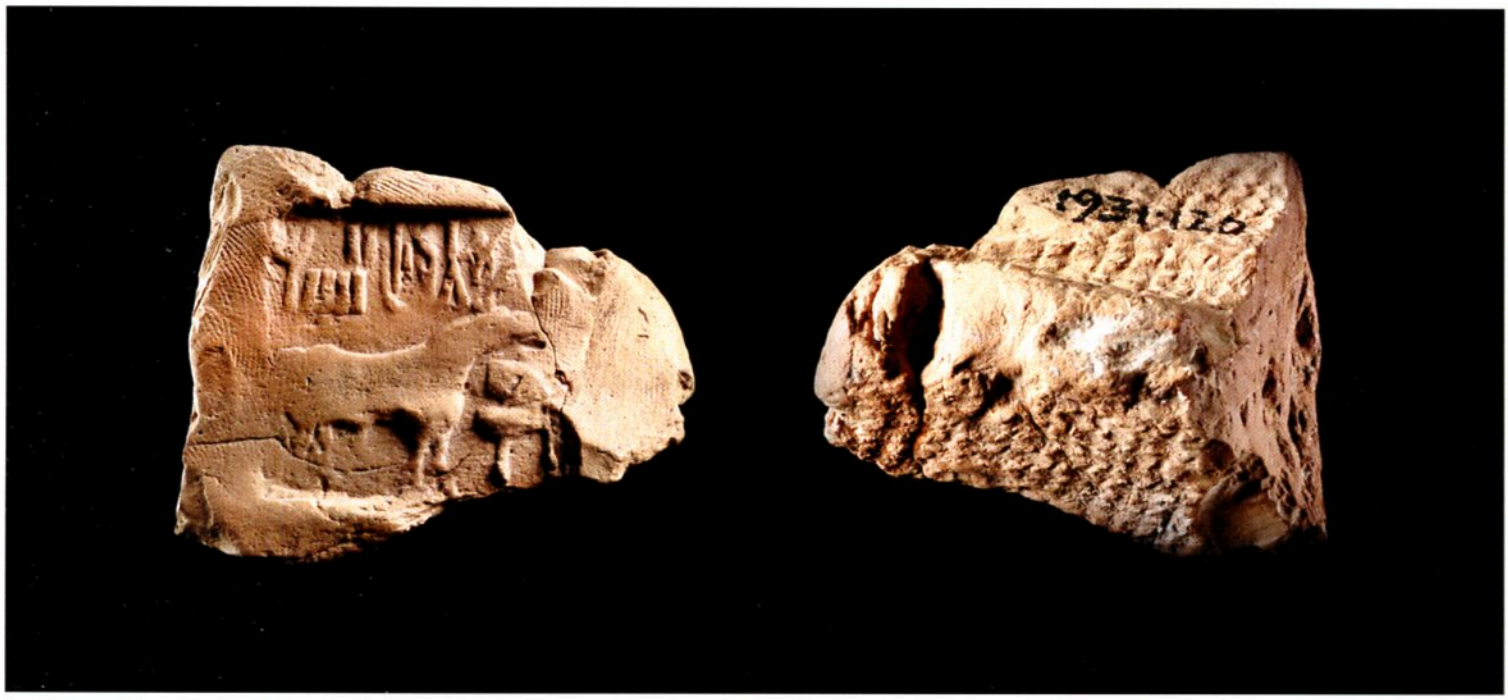
PUBLISHED: Buchanan, Briggs and P. R. S. Moorey eds., *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum, Vol. 11: The prehistoric Stamp Seals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, no. 233

11.5 SEALING WITH A BOVINE IN PROFILE
Terracotta
Said to have been found at Umma, southern Iraq
*c.*2000 BC
Max. L. 5 cm
EA1931.120 (formerly AN1931.120)
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities (Gift of the French Academy, acquired by Schiel)

PUBLISHED: Buchanan, Briggs and P. R. S. Moorey eds., *Catalogue of Ancient Near Eastern Seals in the Ashmolean Museum, Vol. 11: The prehistoric Stamp Seals*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, no. 232, pl. XV, p. 32

Seals such as these and their impressions (sealings) are a distinctive type of artefact found at Harappan sites.[1] Although tiny, they present us with fascinating images and signs that are as sophisticated as they are enigmatic. They often carry complex designs involving humans, animals, plants and, most importantly, a uniform and developed 'script'. Over 400 different signs have been catalogued from about 4,000 short inscriptions. Their decipherment, however, remains one of the most vexing problems relating to this ancient civilisation. The animal forms are carved with remarkable naturalism and artistic skill.

The patterns on the soft steatite stone were carved in intaglio, and the stone was then baked to whiten and harden its surface. Seals are usually square, although they may also be in the shape of long bars, prisms (long bars triangular in section), discs or cylinders.[2]



11.5 (front and back)

Seals are known to have been used in trade, as they and their terracotta sealings have been found in lands further afield, sometimes as far away as Africa, Mesopotamia and Central Asia. A religious or cultic meaning can be associated with at least some of the images in which, for instance, we might find fantastic beasts, composite creatures, humans with animal heads, figures appearing out of plants or even, in one case, a plant emerging from a human. In such cases there can be little doubt that the imagery expresses some ritualistic or cultic ideas, with the various elements of nature shown to be interdependent and powerful. Yet, frustratingly, without more direct evidence, or until the script can be deciphered, our interpretations tantalisingly remain mere speculation.

Prism 'sealings' or tablets such as EAMd.13 are quite unusual.[3] On one face of the prism a male figure sits on a throne or dais, in what is often called a 'yogic' pose. The throne itself is interesting for its hoofed legs. Several seals have shown a male figure seated in this way. In the best known of them he appears to be ithyphallic and, as in this piece, with a horned headdress and possibly masked. Sometimes he is surrounded by animals, which has prompted an identification as a proto-Shiva in his form of Pashupati, 'lord of animals'. Although a clear iconography of the god Shiva is known only from the Early Historic period, such imagery does make one wonder about the antiquity of Hindu gods and practices.[4] In our example the man is flanked by a *gharial*, or crocodile, along with various indistinguishable marks and remnants of what must originally have been animals, fish and snakes. The second face of the seal has five characters in the Indus script; on the last side a bull is seen. In all the known depictions of the yogic man from Indus Valley sites, he is associated with the fish. It is difficult to imagine how this piece could have been used as a sealing, and one wonders whether it might not perhaps have fulfilled another function, such as being contained within an amulet.

The most popularly occurring motif on the seals is the so-called 'unicorn': a bull-like animal with a large horn. As the animal is always shown in strict profile, it is possible the other horn is not visible. Two seals (EA1931.119, EA1956.1000) and a sealing (EA1931.120) in this collection represent such an animal standing before a short upright that might represent a censer or a sacrificial post. One of these glazed steatite seals and a terracotta sealing were found in Mesopotamia: the seal in the excavations at Kish and the sealing in Umma. Ernest Mackay found one of the seals in 1923 while conducting excavations at Kish at Tell Uhaimir, under a pavement built by Hammurapi's son, King Samsu-iluna.[5] The seal must of course be older than Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BC) as it was found in the fill of a foundation. By 1932 about 30 Indus seals were known to have come from Iraq, mostly from the Akkadian period (2334–54 BC).

Typically, there is an inscription above the animal. Although this type of seal is the most common, others have been found that show animals such as the bull, rhinoceros and zebu. More rare are seals with depictions of mythical animals and humans. Another seal from the same group

(EA1956.1001) bears a large horned animal in profile, but the animal does not stand before a post or censer like the others. Also unusual are the three characters in the upper corner of the seal: they include a human bearing a load balanced on two ends of a carrying pole supported on his shoulders, a tree and a square (enclosure?) with a line above it.

11.2

11.4

Impression of 11.3

11.3

1 The terms Indus Valley and Harappan (deriving from Harappa, one of the first known and more impressive of the sites) are used generically to describe the Protohistoric culture of an entire period in South Asia – one that spread, as we now know, across Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Punjab (both Indian and Pakistani), Haryana and Rajasthan, encompassing the river valleys of the seasonal Ghaggar/Hakra in addition to the Indus and its tributaries.

2 Most of this material lies in the local site museums where the excavations have taken place. The objects from some of the significant early excavations are divided between the National Museums at New Delhi and Karachi, and some examples are to be found in international museums. The seals were first analysed in detail by Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*. E. J. H. Mackay, in *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro*, 2 vols., Delhi: Government of India, 1938, detailed the processes involved in their manufacture. They have frequently been examined ever since. An in-depth and original study of the symbolism of the script and animals is provided by A. Parpola in *Deciphering the Indus Script*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, and the most recent and comprehensive study of their use is in S. Ratnagar, *Trading Encounters: From the Euphrates to the Indus in the Bronze Age*, 2nd rev. ed., New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 256–71.

3 Apart from this piece in the Ashmolean, a few other prism seals are known: a terracotta prism seal (MD 602 /M-1429, 4.6 x 1.2 x 1.5 cm) with boat, gharial and script, excavated at Mohenjodaro, see Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 395–6, pl. 116, fig. 14, where five triangular prism seals from his excavations are recorded. Four of these are of terracotta and one is of faience; see also Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, iii, pl. 118, no. 2. One seal is now in the collection of the National Museum of Pakistan, Islamabad, no. NMP: 1384; *ASI-AR* 1924–5; Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, p. 24 and pl. 22 (c), is a similar triangular terracotta prism with animals; however, no characters of the Indus script are to be found on this. H. Hargreaves, *ASI-AR* 1929–30, pl. XXVIII. Further references may be found in J. M. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, Karachi: American Institute of Pakistan Studies and Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 192.

4 D. M. Srinivasan, 'The So-called Proto-Siva Seal from Mohenjo-Daro: An Iconological Assessment', *Archives of Asian Art* 29 (1975–6), pp. 55–56, figs. 13–15.

5 The summary of Henry Field's excavation report of the Herbert Weld (for the University of Oxford) and Field Museum of Natural History (Chicago) Expedition to Mesopotamia, "The Field Museum – Oxford University expedition to Kish, Mesopotamia, 1923–1929", *Anthropology*, Leaflet 28, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago: 1929, can be viewed online: https://archive.org/stream/fieldmuseumoxfor28fiel/fieldmuseumoxfor28fiel_djvu.txt (accessed March 2017). The discovery of the Indus seals in Mesopotamia is also discussed in a slightly contrary vein by C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, 'Trade Mechanisms in Indus-Mesopotamian Interrelations', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 92, no. 2, (Apr.–Jun. 1972), pp. 222–9. For a more up-to-date assessment of contacts between the Near East and Harappan cities see Ratnagar 2004, *op. cit.*, and D. Chakrabarti, *The External Trade of the Indus Civilisation*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990.

12 Three weights

*c.*2450–1900 BC
Indus Valley
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

12.1 WEIGHT
Chert
Mohenjodaro, Sindh, Pakistan
H. 4.3, W. 4.1, D. 2.9 cm
EAMd.7

12.2 WEIGHT
Chert
Mohenjodaro, Sindh, Pakistan
H. 3, W. 3, D. 2.3 cm
EAMd.8

12.3 WEIGHT
Chert
Mohenjodaro, Sindh, Pakistan
H. 1.9, W. 1.9, D. 1.6 cm
EAMd.9

Cubical weights[1] in graduated sizes are another distinctive type of artefact unearthed from Indus Valley cities. They have been an object of fascination ever since their discovery and were first written about by A. S. Hemmy in 1931.[2] Chert (cryptocrystalline silica found in the Rohri Hills in Sindh), which comes in a variety of hues from tawny to grey and is usually beautifully banded or veined, is reserved for the production of cubical weights (though these are also sometimes made of other types of stone). The much less common conical, cylindrical and barrel-shaped weights are made of other hardstones.

These weights conform to the standard Harappan binary weight system that was used in all the settlements. The smaller weights are in proportionate increments of a sixteenth, while the system for the larger weights relies on a decimal increase where the largest is either 10 or 100 times the weight of each of the smaller weights, whose weight increases by multiples of two.[3] This appears to be a unique system; however, it was not unknown either to contemporary protohistoric cultures or in classical systems of weights in the ancient world. While Mesopotamia and Bahrain had their own systems, they traded with the Harappans and were familiar with their weights; Harappan weights are thus found in the Middle East and vice versa.[4] The extraordinary uniformity of weights over so wide an area is compelling evidence for fixed and reliable systems, indicating the presence of regulatory authorities for commerce and, probably, for governance.

1 Although these weights are not strictly speaking cubical, they are generally known as 'cubical weights'.

2 First written up by Hemmy in Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 589–97 and illustrated in iii, pl. 131, nos. 20–35. Subsequently discussed in Mackay 1938, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 601–12. See also E. J. H. Mackay, *Chanhu-daro Excavations*, 1935–36, American Oriental Series, 20, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1943, pp. 239–46, pl. 91, nos. 29–32; on p. 43 the author mentions that 22 weights were found together in what must have been a stonecutter's house. Weights have been the focus of further studies: M. P. Hendrickx-Baudot, 'The Weights of the Harappa Culture', *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, vol. 3, 1972, pp. 5–54, and K. Venkatachalam, 'A study of the weights and measures of the Indus Civilization', *Tamil Civilization* 4 (3–4), 1986, pp. 95–102.

3 The smaller weights proportionately increase thus: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64; this provides a base that could be multiplied by 10 or 100 to achieve the larger decimal weight system related to the decimal increases in the first series: 160, 200, 320, 640, 1,600, 6,400, 8,000, 12,800. As explained by Hendrickx-Baudot 1972, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15, and further by Venkatachalam 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4 and 95–102, and in D. P. Agrawal, *The Archaeology of India*, Scandinavian Institute of Indian Studies, monograph 46, London: Curzon Press, 1981, p. 146. Eleven weights in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston are illustrated in J. M. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, Karachi: American Institute of Pakistan Studies and Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 196, cat. 40. Kenoyer has also illustrated and briefly discussed some more weights in: http://harappa.com/indus/21.html. Interestingly, it should be noted that a related number pattern, although universal, has held particular relevance in India. The traditional Indian ratio of a rupee comprising 16 annas or, as Venkatachalam has shown, its similarity to the traditional Tamil system of Cinilakkam are also systems that use binary progression and the sixteenth ratio.

4 See Ratnagar 2004, *op. cit.*, pp. 246–55.

13 Die

c.2500–1900 BC
Mohenjodaro, Sindh, Pakistan
Terracotta
2 cm cube
EAMd.25
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

PUBLISHED: A. Topsfield ed., *The Art of Play: Board and Card Games of India*, Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2006, p. 15, fig.4.

This die is one of the most interesting of the Ashmolean's objects found at Mohenjodaro. Both types of dice – cubical and the long, bar-shaped ones – are found in Protohistoric settlements and have remained popular until today. Several gaming pieces and counters have been recovered from most Indus cities.[1] However, it seems that those where the sum of opposite sides is seven, as is the case both here and in modern dice, are rare.[2] India has, perhaps, the longest and most developed history of games, which served both secular and religious purposes. Although there are some important literary references to games, particularly to those of chance employing dice (such as the famous episode in the *Mahabharata*),[3] for the most part these activities are rarely documented, and we may never fully understand the role of such games as rituals for prediction.

1 See G. F. Dales, 'Of Dice and Men', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88 (1), 1968, pp. 14–23, reprinted in G. Possehl, ed., *Ancient Cities of the Indus*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979, p. 141, where the author cites several cubical dice from Harappan cities, such as the four published in Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 551–2, illus. vol. iii, pl. 153, nos. 7–10); those recorded by Mackay in Mackay 1938, *op. cit.*, pp. 559–60, pl. 140 (nos. 19, 20, 63) and pl. 142, nos. 84–6). Seven examples (in stone, terracotta and faience) were excavated by Vats in Harappa: M. S. Vats, *Excavations at Harappa: Being an Account of Archaeological Excavations at Harappa Carried out Between the Years 1920–21 and 1933–34, etc.*, 2 vols., Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India, 1940, pl. 120, figs. 46–8, 51–4); one was discovered at Alamgirpur on the outskirts of Delhi (*Archaeological Survey of India: A Review*, 1959, p. 52, pl. 62) and another has been found at Lothal (S. R. Rao, 'Further Excavations at Lothal', *Lalit Kala*, 11, 1962: pp. 14–30. See also Kenoyer 2006, *op. cit.*, fig. 6.40, p. 121.

2 Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, noted that the opposite sides did not always add up to seven. He found instead that one was opposite two, three opposite four and five opposite six. He further recorded that the first protohistoric cubical die from the Indian subcontinent came to light in the 1854 excavations at Brahmanabad, see *Archaeological Survey of India: A Review* 1908–09, p. 85. Dales 1968, *op. cit.*, also cites the various other combinations found in Harappan dice meticulously, and says that only one exceptional case was then known in which the sum of opposite sides was seven. This piece would thus be the second such recorded. Of the few cubical dice known from Mesopotamian sites, Henri Frankfort noted that they came from Akkadian levels that had strong connections with Harappa (H. Frankfort, 'Tell Asmar, Khafaje and Khorsabad: Second Preliminary Report of the Iraq Expedition', *Oriental Institute Communications*, 1933, no. 16, pp. 47–53), while others have been found at Ur: Woolley, *Ur Excavations: The Early Periods*, Philadelphia: The British Museum and Philadelphia Museum, 1955), pp. 44, 79, figs. 7a-b; later (Kassite) examples were found at Nippur: L. van der Heijdt, *Face to Face with Dice: 5000 years of Dice and Dicing*, Groningen: Gopher, 2002. The earliest die from Syria, of c.5000 BC, also exhibits the same enduring characteristic, where the sum of the opposite sides is seven. It was found in the West Temple at the site of Tell Chuera, a classic settlement of the early Uruk Period: see Ursula Moortgart-Correns, 'Tell Chuera', *Archiv für Orientforschung* 35, Graz: Ernst Weidner, 1988, p. 160.

3 An extraordinary use of chance in determining fortune was of course the central episode of the *Mahabharata*, where a game of dice determined the course of the epic story. Yudhishthira, the heroic king and eldest of the Pandava brothers, gambled away in successive throws of dice his personal wealth and that of his family, his kingdom and eventually his wife too. This act spurred on the rest of the epic: the avenging of the wife's dishonour, the winning back of the kingdom and the restitution of righteous moral order.

14 Six animals and a cart

c.2500–1500 BC
Indus Valley

14.1 BULL
(Left horn and hump missing) with a drill hole in the neck
Terracotta
Chanhudaro, Sindh
2500–2300 BC
L. 9.2 cm
EACh.1
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 2

14.2 BULL
Terracotta
Chanhudaro, Sindh
2500–2300 BC
L. 6.4 cm
EACh.4
Purchased for the Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 2

14.3 BULL WITH LEGS DRILLED TO ACCOMMODATE AXLE AND WHEELS
Terracotta
Chanhudaro, Sindh
2500–2300 BC
L. 10 cm
EACh.6
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

14.4 BULL
Unfired clay
Possibly Afghanistan
Date uncertain
L. 8.9 cm
EA1986.29
Gift of Simon Digby

14.5 ELEPHANT
(fragment)
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
2500–1900 BC
L. 6, H. 5.5 cm
EAMd.10
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

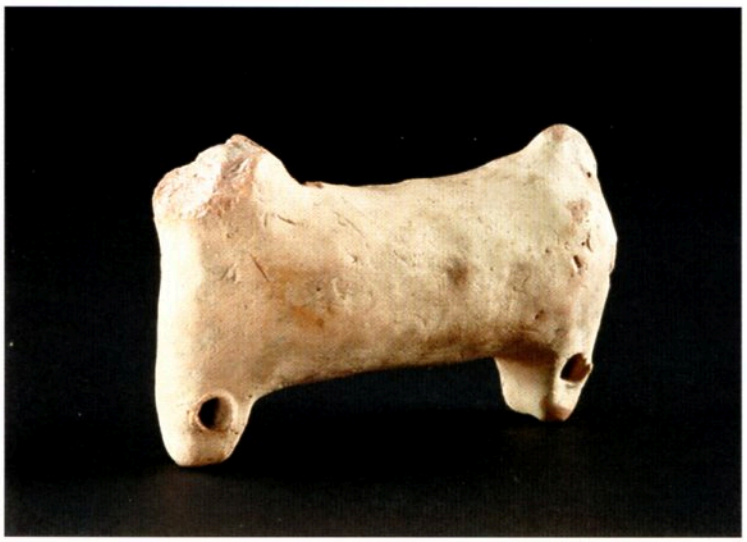
14.2, 14.1

14.6 ANIMAL HEAD
(bull?)
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
2500–1900 BC
L. 4.4 cm
EAMd.11
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

14.7 CART
(not illustrated)
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
2500–1900 BC
L. 7.3 cm
EAMd.12
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

In contrast to the rare occurrence of sculptures of humans, an extraordinary number of terracotta animals have been recovered from Indus Valley sites. The most common are bovine: bulls, water buffaloes, zebus. Some have detached movable heads fixed to the bodies by a bolt. They also often form part of a larger arrangement of draught animals pulling a toy cart. Cat. 14.1, for instance, has a perforation through the neck, evidence that a yoke was originally attached to it. A depression in the animal's neck also indicates where the yoke may have rested. It seems they were sometimes used as wheeled toys, since holes are sometimes present in the animal's hooves or in the base plate. Other animals found at Indus Valley sites include rams, monkeys, elephants, turtles, felines, rhinoceroses, markhors (wild goats), dogs and hares. It is not clear what the function of these objects might have been.

The earliest evidence for carts in Harappa is taken to be about 3700 BC. The model carts are made true to life, and the large number of these 'toys' found is a reflection of the importance of carts at the time.[1] Several accurately portrayed carts from Harappan sites reflect the different types in



14.3

14.4

14.5

14.6

use at the time: while some were designed for speed, a four-poster canopied cart on a plinth would appear to be ceremonial or, like a palanquin, designed to shield its inhabitants. Others were more multipurpose and some would have been used to carry goods.

Apart from being the most fundamental mode of conveyance for people, carts must also be viewed as a most significant technological requirement of the time, since they were able to transport commodities (for example, bricks to construct huge urban centres, grain to support their inhabitants, etc.). That bulls held an important ritual position in Harappan culture is suggested by the repeated use of their horns as a motif on pottery, as a headdress for men in 'yogic' postures and by the common association of a decorated bovine animal (the famous Indus 'unicorn') with a sacrificial post on the seals. It is thus hardly surprising to see toys made in their likeness in an agrarian economy, in which bulls would have been highly valued and were the most common domestic animal.

In Indian mythology the bull is a potent symbol of virility. Vrishabha or Nandi, the bull, is the mount of Shiva and the goddess Durga suppresses the buffalo demon Mahisha. Bovine animals are known to have been ritually sacrificed since antiquity. It is therefore as easy to speculate on the ritual implication of these objects as on their secular use as gaming counters or toys. Vehicles such as boats in Egypt, or animals such as horses in Han Chinese burials, provide modes of conveyance for the journey of the spirit to the afterlife. One may thus speculate that these carts were intended as a land-dweller's means of transport to the next life. There can, however, be no doubt at all that the making of both carts and animals was common and widespread in the subcontinent from pre-Indus Valley levels through to the post-Mauryan period and even later. Further, these animals are modelled with tremendous feeling, often capturing the essence of the animal's mood in contrast to the general stylisation of the human forms from the same period.

1 It is worth noting that model boats, the other major mode of transport at the time, have also been unearthed at Harappan sites.

15 Jewellery, beads and other objects of Harappan manufacture

15.1

2500–1900 BC
Provenances various; materials various

15.1 KOHL APPLICATOR
(spindle whorl?)
Copper
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
L. 9.9 cm
EAMd.14
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.2 BANGLE
Terracotta
Chanhudaro, Sindh
diam. 6.5 cm
EACh.3
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.3 BANGLE
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
diam. 8 cm
EAMd.1
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.4 BANGLES
(four fragments, not illustrated)
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
EAMd.4
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.5 BANGLES
(three fragments, not illustrated)
Terracotta
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
EA1980.223
Gift of Wing-Commander R. P. Norman (collected on the surface of the site by Mrs Norman)

15.6 BANGLE
(fragments, not illustrated)
Conch shell
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
L. 4.7 cm
EAMd.22
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.7 LADLE HANDLE
(not illustrated)
Conch shell
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
L. 8.2 cm
EAMd.36i
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

15.8 RING
(fragments, not illustrated)
Terracotta
Vicinity of Mohenjodaro, Sindh
diam. 2.3 cm
EAMd.23
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.9 TWENTY-FOUR BEADS
(not illustrated)
Carnelian
Harappa, Sindh
EAHr.3
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

15.10 THREE BEADS
Coral, agate, carnelian
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
EAX.2494

15.11 BEADS, GLASS FRAGMENTS, ETC.
(?), bone, etc.
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
EAMd.28
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

15.12 FINIAL OR KNOB
Terracotta
Chanhudaro, Sindh
H. 4.5 cm
EACh.12
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

This selection of small objects provides an insight into the daily lives of the inhabitants of Harappan cities.[1] Renowned for their sophisticated seals, Harappan craftsmen are known also for bead-making and other crafts, worked in semi-precious stone, glass, faience and shell, as well as gold and copper. There is evidence of a clear evolution in the development of these crafts, which is concomitant with the history of their acce to various raw materials, and by extension provides us a rich history of trade, both in raw materials and finished goods. This becomes abundantly apparent at least fro the Kot Diji Phase of 2600 BC, although some traces of this evolution can be found even earlier in the pre – and Early Indus cultures. These objects are interesting not for archaeological reasons alone, nor merely for the history of crafts: they provide evidence of an inspiring network of cities and for a knowledge of quarries, seafaring and riverine trade. Furthermore this information can be used to advance th understanding of contemporaneous socia processes.[2]

Large numbers of bangles, mostly mad of terracotta, have been found at Harappa sites. They are easily made and, like mode Indian glass bangles, were inexpensive an readily replaced. It seems that these bangl would originally have been painted with black and red designs.

15.2

15.3

15.11

15.10

15.12

Conch shell bangles and ladles, such as the fragmentary examples illustrated, are relatively rarely found at sites along the Indus Valley, but are much more common at contemporaneous sites in Gujarat. Enormous workshops, with thousands of shells in different stages of being cut and worked on, have been found in Bagasara (at Nageshwar and Gola Dhoro). It would seem that shell ladles and bangles were manufactured here and exported to inland sites such as Mohenjodaro, where both the shell objects in the Museum's collection were found. The popularity of conch shell bangles and stone beads, like so much other ancient Indus artisanal industry, lives on in modern India.

In their time the Harappan cultures were unique throughout the world in the sophistication and widespread practice of stone – and metal-working. Carnelian, mined as agate, was heated to acquire its distinctive deep orange colour. It was often fashioned into long barrel-shaped or biconical beads, sometimes etched and decorated with white alkaline paste or dark metal oxides. Steatite was used to make beads, seals, amulets and animal figurines, and was treated in a variety of ways. As mentioned above, it was baked to whiten and harden its surface after it had been shaped and carved to make a seal. To make faience, the steatite was first pulverised, then mixed with inclusions of sand and metal oxides to form a body paste; it was then fired. Shell for ladles, bangles and beads, as well as lapis lazuli for beads, were all imported: the former from coastal regions and lapis from Badakhshan in Afghanistan. Onyx and agate were locally mined.

Cat. 15.12, the small, conical, weight-like terracotta object, is damaged. The terracotta is fired to a light salmon colour and shows traces of a black wash. A hole drilled in the depression on one side does not go through the length of the object. It is unlikely to be a weight (whether for a textile loom or fishing net), nor a spindle whorl, a child's spinning-top or simply a large bead, since the perforation does not go through the object.[3] It is broken off at the narrower end of the cone, suggesting that this is part of a larger object to which it would have been attached as a finial or knob.

The University's Indian Institute Museum (1897–1962), a precursor of the Ashmolean's Department of Eastern Art, made a large purchase of Indus Valley artefacts in 1941 from Charles L. Fabri, the noted Indian art historian, through the Max Müller Fund. At the time, Fabri was stationed at Lahore and made several collecting visits to sites in Pakistan and Kashmir.[4]

1 The Museum also has a holding of various other semi-precious objects from India: see cats. 74, 110.12 and 148 below.

2 The importance of using rare commodities as objects of social differentiation is discussed by J. M. Kenoyer, 'Wealth and Socio-Economic Hierarchies', in *Order, Legitimacy and Wealth in Ancient States*, J. Richards and M. van Buren, eds., New Directions in Archaeology series, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 90–112, and M. W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade and Power*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. Various authors have remarked on the parallels between Harappan and modern Indian lapidary technology: see G. Possehl 'Cambay Bead Making: An Ancient Craft', in Petraglia 1998, *op. cit.*; *Expedition: Bulletin of the University of Museum of the University of Pennsylvania*, August 1981, 23/4, pp. 39–47.

3 Small objects of various types, though unlike the systematic square chert weights, are often described as 'weights'. However, it is not known what system these smaller weights might have followed nor to what use they might have been put.

4 A letter in the Department of Eastern Art archive dated 16 May 1940 from Fabri to Prof. Edward Johnston, Boden Professor and Keeper of the Indian Institute, details the 159 items he had gathered for the Institute, which arrived with labels that made clear precisely from which site each potsherd was collected.

16 Two birds

2500–2300 BC
Chanhudaro, Sindh

16.1 TERRACOTTA
(undecorated)
H. 5.7 cm
EACH.5

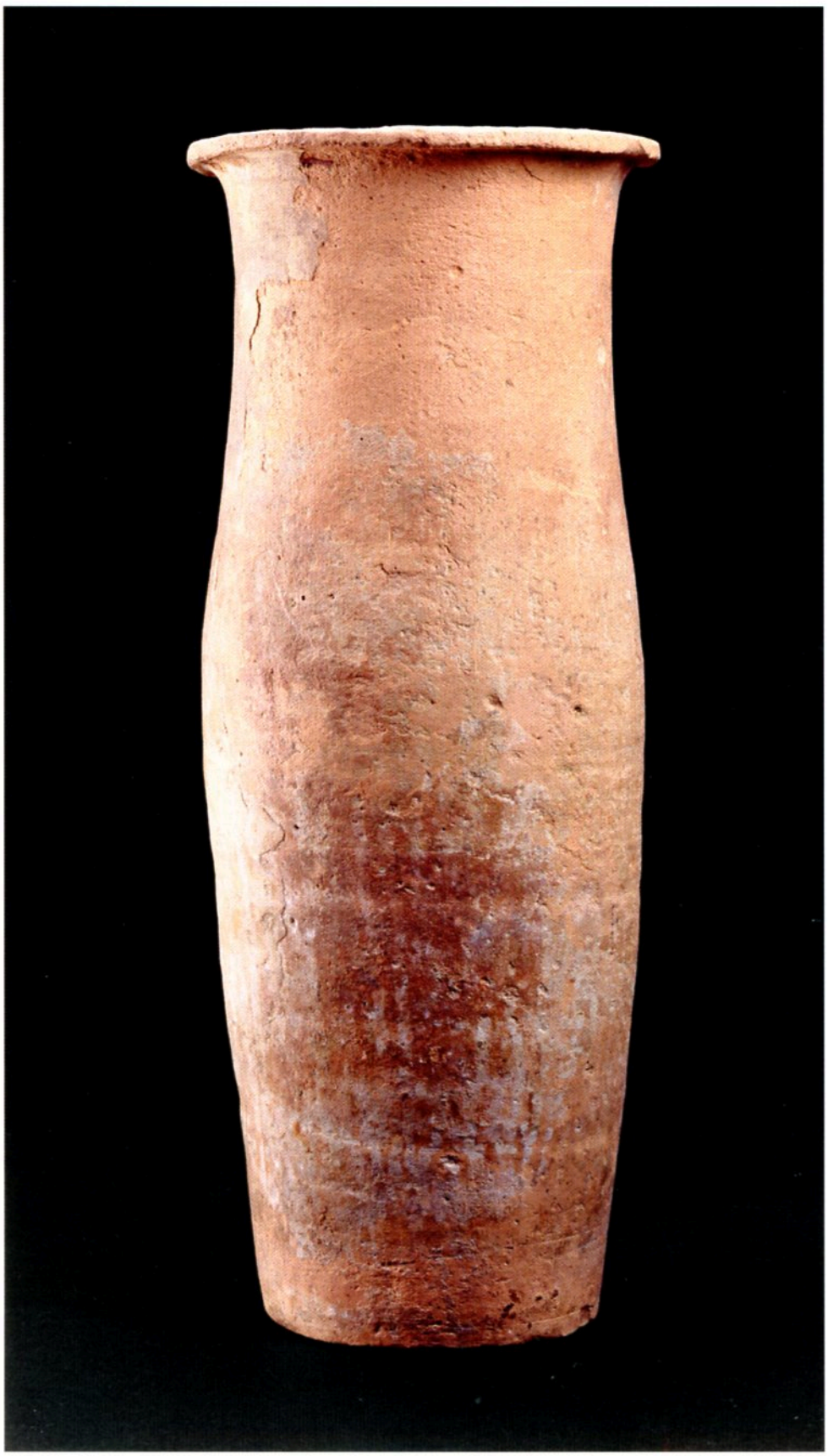
16.2 TERRACOTTA
(decorated with red ochre bands)
H. 5.4 cm, L. 6.2 cm
EACH.7
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

16.1–2

The dove- or hen-shaped birds are hollow, with a flat base and a hole at the tail. The heads of both are missing. However, they can be compared with several other intact, excavated examples.[1] These objects have been called whistles because of the presence of a small opening or hole, but one can speculate on alternative uses to which they may have been put. Terracotta feeding cups for babies, for instance, are still made in animal forms with a single small opening such that the milk falls out of the cup in regulated drops. They could also have been rattles or gaming counters.

1 A. G. Poster, *From Indian Earth: 4,000 Years of Terracotta Art* (exhib. cat.), Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1986, no. 6, is a fine example of a bird whistle; now in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, it came from the excavations at Chanhudaro. It bears brushstrokes of pigment and pellet-shaped eyes. See also Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 551, 554, and vol. 3, pl. 153, figs. 17–18. Further images of bird – and hollow egg-shaped terracotta whistles can be found at http://www.harappa.com/figurines/62 html, and http://www.harappa.com/indus/6.html.

17 Indus Valley pots



17.2

*c.*Second millennium BC
Terracotta

17.1 SHERD OF A PEDESTALLED DISH
(not illustrated)
Harappa
H. 8.5, W. 15.3 cm
EAHr.7 (iii)
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

17.2 LONG JAR
Indus Valley, unrecorded site
H. 31.4 cm
EAX.7424

17.3 DISPOSABLE DRINKING VESSEL
Indus Valley, unrecorded site
H. 14.5 cm
EAX.7430

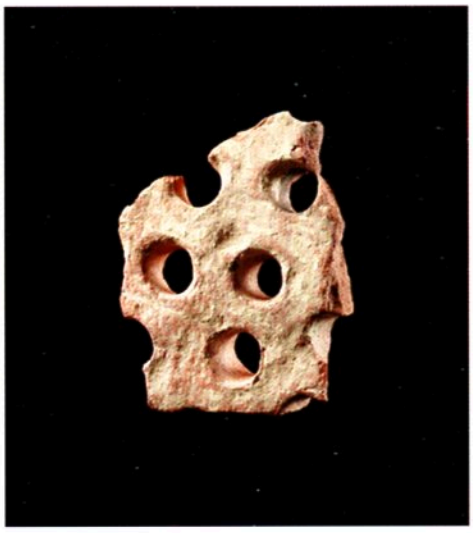
17.4 PAINTED SHERD
Chanhudaro, Sindh
H. 15, W. 10, section 1 cm
Thin, salmon-coloured slip on outside, missing in places. Decorated with variation of the 'hide' motif (Marshall 1931, vol. 1, p. 327; pls. XLI i-ii)
EAX.2488
From the collection of Sir Marc Aurel Stein

17.5A SHERD FROM A PERFORATED JAR
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
L 3.8 cm
EAMd.21

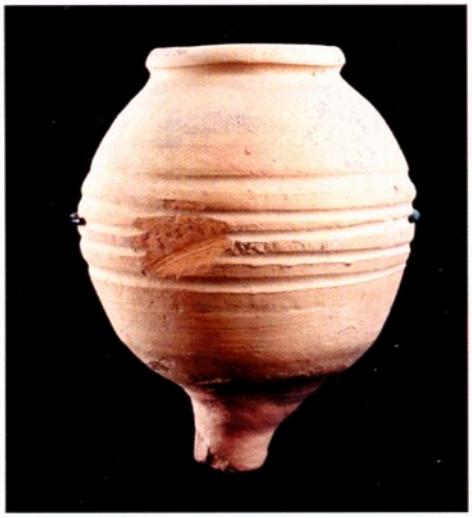
17.5B SHERD FROM A PERFORATED JAR
Harappa, Sindh
Approx. 5 × 5 cm
EAHr.8
Another small group of sherds, collected at Mohenjodaro by Barbara Craig (Principal of Somerville College, Oxford), was given to the Museum in 1980.

Close examination of Indus Valley sherds and pots reveals that they were mostly fashioned on a fast wheel, either as complete, medium-sized jars or pots. Some of the more complex pieces – such as pedestalled dishes – and very large jars were made of separate, wheel-thrown parts that were luted together before firing.[1] Vertical kilns with a subterranean firing chamber, surmounted by perforated bricks that drew the heat up through it, have been found at a few Harappan sites. These kilns can only hold smaller wares and must have been

17.4



17.5a



17.3

17.5b

used concurrently with the more common Indian pit or open-fired kilns.[2] It seems the expanded rounded bases of large jars and pots may have been made by beating them out with a paddle and anvil, just as the bases of the round-bottomed Indian water pots are still made today.

The sherd of a flat dish (cat. 17.1) would have been of the type that is supported on a pedestalled stand and usually termed a ceremonial 'offering-stand'.[3] It is one of the most distinctive classes of vessels produced by the Indus potters. There are several variants of this form. While some of the better known pieces are extremely finely made and of larger size, the tiny piece in the Ashmolean is of a coarser, undecorated and smaller variety.

The long jar represents a type that is found in many sizes; given its shape, it was very probably used as for storage.[4] The small, globular, disposable drinking cup is so called because of its similarity to the extremely common drinking vessels used across the Indian subcontinent until recent times, when plastic cups began to replace them. Cups of this kind are commonly found at Harappan sites. They always have a pointed, unfinished foot, being prised off a spinning wheel.

Painted decoration, as seen on the sherd from Chanhudaro, is usually in black on a pot covered in red slip. The bold geometric pattern found here, executed with a heavy black line, is similar to that found on very large jars and pots in the so-called Phases A and B at Mohenjodaro.[5] Several other small sherds in the collection are gathered from various early and late Indus sites in Baluchistan. Many of these are painted in a variety of pigments, on varying colours of clay bodies and slip covered pots.[6] One of the sherds in the collection is part of a large group picked up by Sir Marc Aurel Stein, probably on one of his later trips to the region in 1940–41 or 1943.[7]

The perforated fragments are parts of a distinct type of (usually) large jar often found in western Indus Valley sites. While some have speculated that, if lined with muslin, the jars could have been used to thicken yogurt or prepare other dairy prod-ucts, others have suggested that they may have been refuse jars draining the water an collecting compost. These jars have even been associated with rituals that may have involved filtering substances.

Our understanding of Indus pottery is limited because of the very different procedures for (and even values we attach to) data collection and analysis today compared to when the sites were excavated The quantitative analyses that were done of the masses of sherds and pots that came out of the rich excavations at Mohenjodaro Harappa and Chanhudaro were inadequat Furthermore, while today it is known that different types of pots are found in differen parts of a site – since each pot has a specific function and is used by a specific commu-nity, or perhaps even by a different ethnic group – such data were not always system-atically recorded. One must therefore rely on the work of those scholars who have tri subsequently to reopen and reinvestigate the original excavations at these seminal sites.

1 Although no actual wheels have been found in Indus excavations, for an explanation of the types o wheels used in India see B. Saraswati, *Pottery-Makin Cultures and Indian Civilisation*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1978, pp. 16–18.

2 B. Saraswati and N. K. Behura, *Pottery Techniques in Peasant India*, Anthropological Survey of India Memoir 13, Calcutta, 1966, pp. 103–12, 120–5.

3 Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

4 See a similar piece from Mohenjodaro in Marsha 1931, *op. cit.*, iii, pl. 78, no. 11.

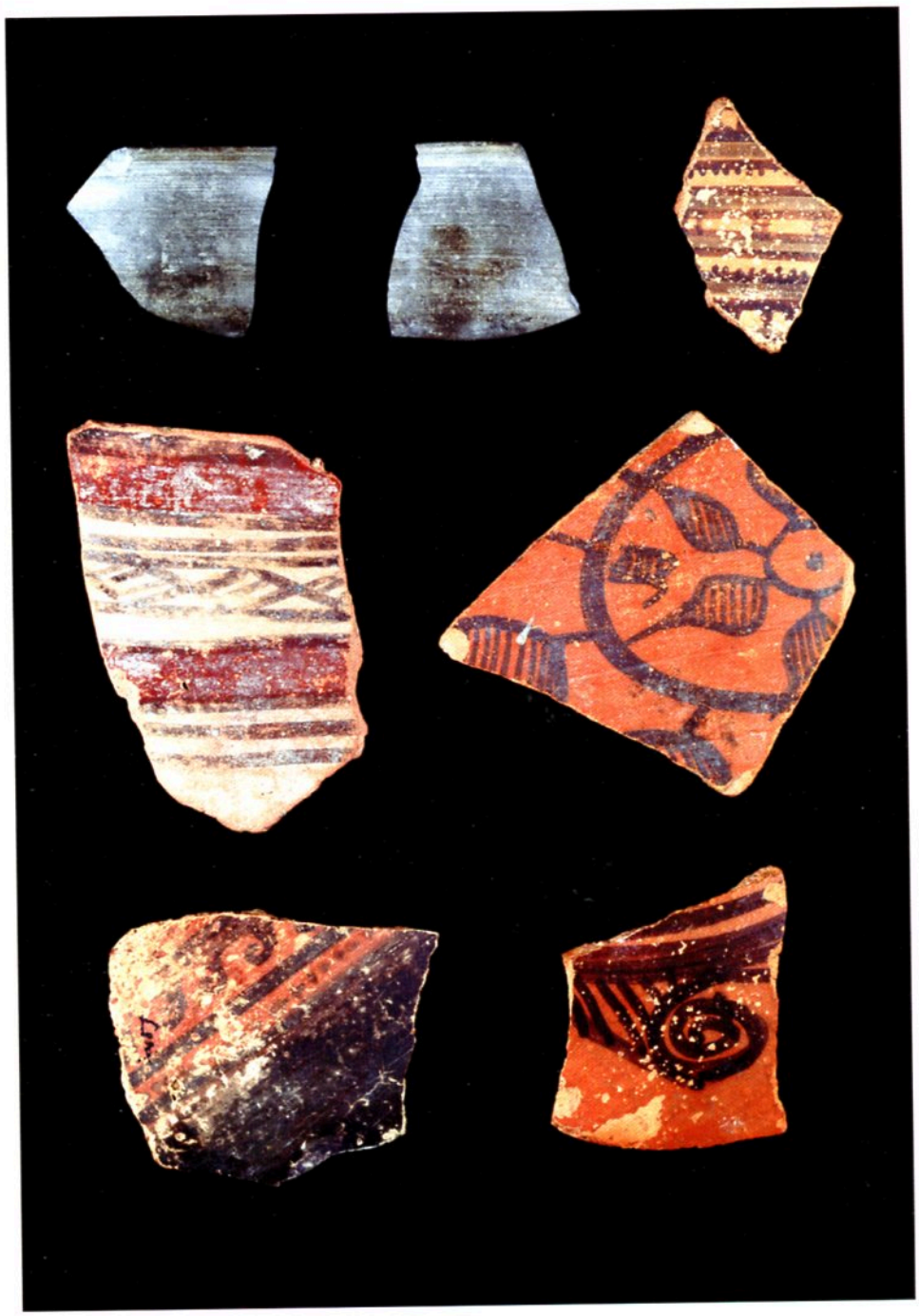
5 G. Dales and J. M. Kenoyer, *Excavations at Mohen Daro, Pakistan: The Pottery*, University Museum monograph 53, Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1986, p. 49, figs. G and H; Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

6 For a brief summary of the minerals used in producing coloured pigments, see Dales and Keno 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–4.

7 For a summary of Aurel Stein's explorations in th area, see Possehl 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–9.

18 Group of seven sherds

Variously dateable between 3000–1750 BC
Baluchistan and Waziristan
Terracotta
EA1945.85
From the collection of Sir Marc Aurel Stein



The seven sherds illustrated here are a small sampling of a larger group collected by Sir Marc Aurel Stein. His important reconnaissances in the field on his journeys through Waziristan, Baluchistan, the Northwest Frontier and Central Asia[1] were documented by him in extraordinary detail. Yet although the resultant publications have been a benchmark on which subsequent scholarship on these regions is built, information on exactly where these sherds were collected is not recorded.

The painted Harappan sherd (cat. 18.4) was probably collected on one of Stein's later journeys to the region in 1940–41 or 1943.

The two sherds illustrated on the top left (cats. 18.1 and 18.2) are a common and widespread type of plain grey ware and are consequently very difficult to date precisely. However, the polychrome sherd next to them (cat. 18.3), with green stripes within ochre and black borders on a buff body, is likely to come from the area of Baluchistan and Waziristan where similar designs are found, and from where all the other sherds in this group seem to come. Cats. 18.5 and 18.6 are both from the Harappan period. The red terracotta ground with black painting in various leaf patterns is widespread at many Harappan sites along the Indus, and can also be compared to Londo Ware.[2] Some of the sherds in this group (not illustrated) may even belong to periods anterior to the Mature Harappan.

1 For a summary of Stein's explorations in this area, see Possehl 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–9.

2 Compare, for instance, sherds from Dabar Kot illustrated by Fairservis 1959, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 313 (c & e).

19 Nine small pots

19.1–8

c.2550–1900 BC
Indus Valley
Terracotta

19.1 SMALL BEAKER
Harappa
H. 6.4, diam. 3.8 cm
EA1974.1
Gift of the Revd. Cuthbert King, ICS

19.2 MINIATURE ROUND-BODIED JAR
(lip chipped)
Harappa
H. 5.6, diam. 6.6 cm
EAX.7286
Gift of E. A. A. Joseph

19.3 MINIATURE ROUND-BODIED JAR
Harappa
H. 5.6, diam. 5.1 cm
EAX.7287
Gift of E. A. A. Joseph

19.4 MINIATURE TALL JAR WITH EVERTED LIP
Harappa
H. 10.2, diam. 6.6 cm
EAX.7288
Gift of E. A. A. Joseph

19.5 MINIATURE FLASK WITH POINTED BOTTOM
(lip broken)
Harappa
H. 8.7, diam. 3.8 cm
EAX.7289
Gift of E. A. A. Joseph

19.6 MINIATURE TALL JAR WITH EVERTED LIP
(rim chipped, broken and repaired)
Harappa
H. 6.7, diam. 4.3 cm
EAX.7290
Gift of E. A. A. Joseph

19.7 MINIATURE TALL JAR
(rim chipped)
Harappa
H. 5.9, diam. 3.7cm
EAX.7291
Gift of E. A. A. Joseph

19.8 MINIATURE POT
(wheel made, traces of paint)
Mohenjodaro
H. 5, diam. 6.2 cm
EAMd.27
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

19.9 HOLLOW TERRACOTTA BRAZIER (?)
with notched ornamentation
Mohenjodaro
H. 4 cm
EAMd.29
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

At first glance the Indus civilisation is characterised by its monumentality: an impressive network of large, highly planned cities with extensive water and sanitation systems, dockyards, granaries and communal baths spread over 2,000 square miles, accompanied by an elaborate writing system with over 400 pictographic symbols. Yet for the archaeologist it is a civilisation

20 Two terracotta balls

19.9

equally rich in its ability to make small or miniature artefacts. Terracotta pots, beads and seals are a case in point. The Museum holds a charming collection of 'tiny pots' from Harappa and Mohenjodaro that replicate the characteristic large Indus Valley storage jars. They are found at nearly every site of the Harappan period.

It is always difficult to know for certain how the different pots were used. The morphology of the pot is the best guide. However, this problem is particularly perplexing in the case of such 'tiny pots'.[1] The usual explanations – that they may have been used as toys or for cosmetics[2] – seem inadequate. While the more celebrated 'tiny pots' are finely made replicas of larger Indus pots, those represented in this collection are the much more commonly found, undecorated, carelessly made tall – and round-bodied jars of an orange to pinkish terracotta. It is possible to speculate whether, like miniature carts, such pots were symbolic offerings made to the deceased.

1 G. F. Dales and J. M. Kenoyer, *Excavations at Mohenjo Daro, Pakistan: The Pottery*, University Museum monograph 53, Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1986, pp. 24–5.
2 Vats 1940, p. 315.

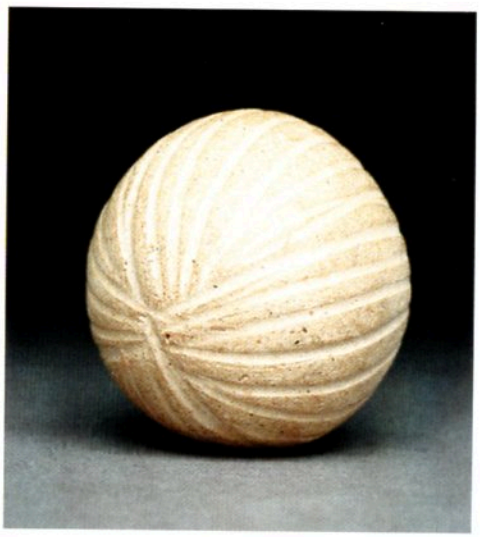
c.2450–1900 BC
Indus Valley

20.1 BALL OR GAMING DEVICE
Mohenjodaro, Sindh
diam. 3.3 cm
EAMd.24
Gift of Lady Harrison

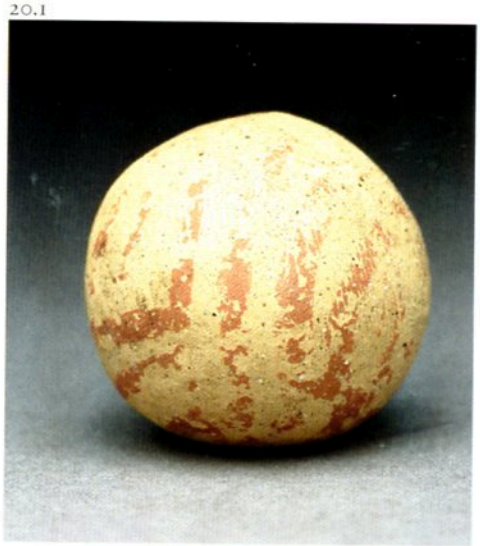
20.2 BALL OR GAMING DEVICE
Chanhudaro, Sindh
diam. 3.5 cm
EACh.8
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

It is possible that small clay balls such as these may have been used as gaming devices, perhaps an ancient equivalent of children's marbles. Some examples are hollow with pellets trapped inside, in which case they were possibly meant to be rattles.[1] They are often covered with a slip and bear grooved decoration (as is Cat. 20.2). Small balls have also been found which are made of other materials, such as shell and stone.[2]

1 M. Wheeler, *Charsada: A Metropolis of the North-West Frontier*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 74.
2 Marshall 1931, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 552–3, vol. 3, pl. 153, no. 11; Kenoyer 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 214, cat. no. 112, illustrates a gaming piece(?) made of shell, diam. 3.2 cm. Similar objects have also been recovered at Rang Mahal. Terracotta balls were found in almost every stratigraphic layer of the excavations at Sonkh, near Mathura, ranging from 700 BC to AD 1700: see H. Härtel, *Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura District*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1993, pp. 236–37.



20.1



20.2

21 Socketed axe

c.2000 BC
Afghanistan
Bronze
L. 12.8 cm
EA1986.55
Gift of Simon Digby

This distinctively shaped, curved, spur-headed axe is of a type widely recorded from the BMAC (Bactria–Margiana Archaeological Complex) sites that are spread over Central Asia, including Afghanistan, Iran and the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. A wooden haft would have been inserted in the socket and secured by lashing, through the small holes provided on either side of the central part of the socket. The piece is badly corroded.[1]

The arid mounds scattered over the landscape of northern Afghanistan, southern Uzbekistan and the Turkestan plains were the subject of extensive research under the Afghan–Soviet Archaeological Mission in the 1970s. BMAC cultures were largely discovered and named by Victor Sarianidi. He found numerous monumental structures at many different sites including Delbarjin (Dalverzin), the Dashly Oasis, Toholok 21, Gonur, Kalleli, Sapelli and Djarkutan. Some of these sites are simple nomadic settlements; others are fortified, with impressive walls and gates. The people interred in the graves associated with these sites are thought to be the first Indo–Aryan-speaking people in these regions. The objects and rituals of these early Indo–Iranians have been identified by some scholars as evidence of the earliest material traces of Zoroastrian and Vedic cultures.[2]

The archaeological monuments of southeastern Uzbekistan and southwestern Tadjikistan are products of the cultural zone that includes parts of Afghanistan – and naturally, by extension, has close ties with the Protohistoric cultures of the Indus Valley. There is, however, no reason to believe that this region was inhabited by a homogeneous ethnic or linguistic group. The archaeological variety within the region demonstrates that it became the area of migration of pastoral tribes of the Andronovo culture, who lived here with the farming communities already settled in the area. The Andronovo culture (based mainly in the steppes to the north) was essentially nomadic. Yet its impressive material culture, including monumental architecture, bronze tools, ceramics and semi-precious stone jewellery, exhibit the hallmarks of civilisation.

There is evidence of this culture, in its earliest developed stages, in the Urals and Central Asia in 2100 BC, and it reached its peak at sites such as the Dzharkutan temple, Kangurttut settlement and Tigrovaya necropolis between 1800 and 1300 BC. This piece, probably from a grave in northern Afghanistan and closely related in form and technique to artefacts of the Sapelli Tepe culture, is a vestige of the Bronze Age cultures of the steppes that formed the basis of the great kingdom of Bactria by the seventh century BC.

1 Compare V. I. Sarianidi, *Die Kunst des Alten Afghanistan: Architektur, Keramik, Siegel: Kunstwerke aus Stein und Metall*, Leipzig: VEB, 1986, p. 240, fig. 79.

2 V. I. Sarianidi, preface to F. T. Hiebert, *Origins of the Bronze Age Oasis Civilization in Central Asia*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994; V. I. Sarianidi, 'Soviet Excavations in Bactria: The Bronze Age', in G. Ligabue and S. Salvatori, eds., Bactria: An ancient oasis civilization from the sands of Afghanistan, Venice: Erizzo, 1995.

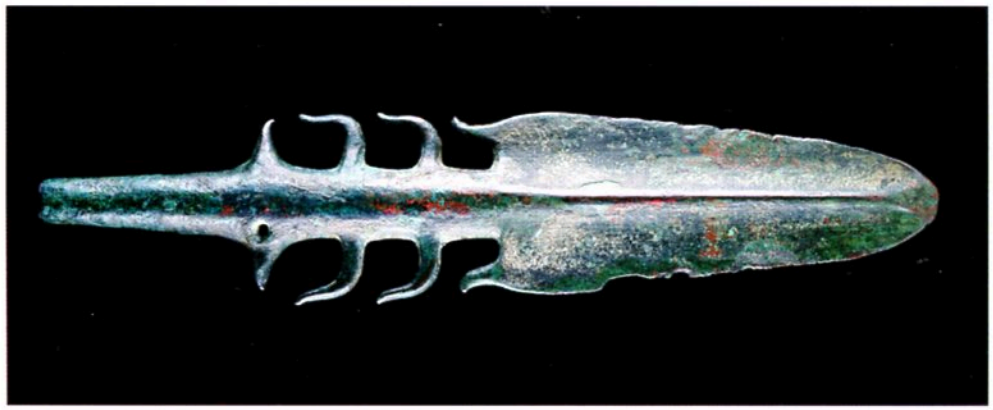
22 Two objects of the Copper Hoard culture

*c.*2500–1000 BC
Ganga Valley and Central India

22.1 AXE HEAD
Copper
Gungeria, Madhya Pradesh
L. 19.1, W. 13 cm
EA1954.66
Gift of Major H. L. Haughton
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities (previously AN1927.6198)

22.2 HARPOON
Copper, cast in a mould
Probably from eastern Uttar Pradesh
L. 29.8 cm
EA1986.13
Gift of Douglas and Mary Barrett

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 3



A wide range of fascinating hoards of copper objects in the form of weapons, tools and implements have been found in North India and Pakistan. The most interesting of them, unique in shape, come from the Doab, that is, the Ganga and Yamuna river plains. The precise use of such heavy copper objects remains uncertain. Although they are fashioned as weapons and implements, the weight of some of the larger objects limits their interpretation along utilitarian lines. They may have been valuable objects for use in rituals, objects of exchange or status symbols.[1] This is not the case with the two objects illustrated here, however, which seem very much to be types that could be used.

The exact find spot of the harpoon is not known. Harpoons of this sort have been found in the middle Ganga–Yamuna Doab, at sites such as Kanpur, Hardoi, Shahabad and Sitapur, as well as at closely adjacent sites.[2] It is cast by the *cire perdue* ('lost wax') process. The harpoon has a pronounced middle rib, with a long triangular spearing tip, two pairs of curved barbs below and a pair of tangs, one of which is pierced with a small eyelet to enable the head to be attached to the shaft and secured by a line. The object would have been attached to a hollow shaft, such as a reed or bamboo.[3]

Many Copper Hoard sites are found with an associated Ochre Coloured Pottery. Although these hoards are usually dated between 2300 and 1000 BC, it should be noted that even with the aid of comparisons between sites, with the rare discovery of a piece in a stratified context and with the thermoluminescence testing of associated pottery, there remain enough variations in the material to make it difficult to postulate a clear set of dates for this culture. This subgroup to which the harpoon belongs reveals a separate cultural identity from that of the group found in both Punjab and Pakistan. It seems that the Copper Hoard cultures coexisted with at least the later phases of Harappan culture, although at some sites they appear to have been earlier as well, and continued until they were replaced by Early Iron Age assemblages, usually characterised by the presence of the distinct Painted Grey Ware.[4]

The Museum also possesses an axehead from the largest of all known Copper Age hoards. This mammoth deposit of 424 copper objects, accompanied by about 100 bulls' heads with downturned horns made of sheet silver, had a total reported weight of 376 kg. It was found at Gungeria, a site south of Jabalpur in Balaghat District of

Madhya Pradesh, which is on the edge of the ambit of the sophisticated copper weapons. Their discovery, together with a large amount of silver, makes this a unique prehistoric find.

The world view of the early Indo–Aryans, embodied in their sophisticated Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas, has not so far been matched by actual discoveries of sites, artefacts and wider assemblages of the material culture of that period. The texts must have been composed in the second millennium BC, and a number of scholars have tried to relate the Copper Hoard culture to Vedic tribes. They usually equate the Rig Vedic copper *vajra* with the weapons of the Copper Hoards. Harry Falk notes that the actual weapons are unwieldy and must therefore have been used largely in psychological warfare and in rituals;[5] he derives this premise from Middle Vedic texts such as the *Yajurveda samhita* and the commentary on it in the *Brahmanas*. By the time of these texts the *vajra* was no longer the specific weapon wielded by Indra, but an appellation for any lethal weapon. Furthermore, Falk contends that, while the Rig Vedic tribes were active in the Punjab, Middle and Later Vedic tribes had begun to move east, to the catchment area of the copper weapons. Others have related the weapons purely to the Atharva Vedic people, consumed as their texts are with magic and psychology.[6] B. B. Lal, on the other hand, noticed the correlation of the Copper Hoards with Ochre Coloured Pottery, and associated both with the people who inhabited the Doab before the arrival of the Aryans, and whose descendants may have been the Austro–Asiatic speaking Mundas, Santhals and other tribes that belong to the proto-Australoid groups.[7] It is not uncommon to encounter communities that have found prehistoric tools and fancifully related them to epic heroes: they have even been said to be remnants of the fantastic weapons used by Rama!

However unlikely these varied hypotheses remain, and although archaeology has brought to light hardly any evidence of definitely Vedic material culture (the dating of Vedic texts is itself conjectural), attempts to link textual information with archaeological remains, however difficult, must continue if a holistic understanding of the texts or the objects is ever to be found.

---

1 P. Yule, 'On the Function of Prehistoric Copper Hoards of the Indian Subcontinent', in J. Schotsman and M. Taddei, eds., *South Asian Archaeology 1983: Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*, Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1985; P. Yule, A. Hauptmann and M. J. Hughes, 'The Copper Hoards of the Indian Subcontinent: Preliminaries for an Interpretation', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseum*, XXXVI, Mainz, 1989, pp. 495–508.

2 A large collection of 22 such harpoons is at the National Museum, New Delhi. For an analysis of the techniques of manufacture and sources of copper, see D. P. Agrawal, 'Metal Technology of the Indian Protohistoric Cultures: Its Archaeological Implications', *Puratattva*, 3, 1969–70, pp. 15–22, who suggests that the Rakha, Singhbhum and Dalbhum mines of Bihar and Chhota Nagpur are a likely source for these implements.

3 P. Yule, *Metalwork of the Bronze Age in India*, Munich: Prähistorische Bronzefunde, 20, 1985.

4 For a summary, see Allchin and Allchin 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 254–61.

5 For a summary article on these ideas and for further references, see H. Falk, 'Copper Hoard Weapons and the Vedic Vajra', *South Asian Archaeology 1993*, eds. A. Parpola and P. Koskikallio, Helsinki, pp. 193–206; see also Yule 1985, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–275.

6 See D. P. Sharma, *Newly Discovered Copper Hoard: Weapons of South Asia*, Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, pp. 8–9, and references therein. A remarkable early anthropomorph, with traces of Brahmi script, from the collection of the Archaeological Survey of India (Delhi) is discussed in Naman P. Ahuja, *The Body in Indian Art and Thought*, Antwerp / Brussels: Ludion, 2013, pp. 54–56, 80, fig. 72.

7 B. B. Lal, 'Further Copper Hoards from the Gangetic Basin and a Review of the Problem', *Ancient India* 7, 1951, pp. 20–39; and referred to also by Makkhan Lal, 'Copper Hoard Culture of India: A reassessment,' *Puratattva: Bulletin of the Indian Archaeological Society*, 12, ed. K. N. Dikshit, 1980–81, pp. 72–76.

23 Group of seven sherds

Variously dateable between 2000 and 900 BC
Pirak
Terracotta
From the collection of Sir Marc Aurel Stein

ILLUSTRATED: **23.1–23.7** (L to R, from the top):
AN1964.623
AN1964.626
AN1964.627
AN1964.625
AN1964.632a
AN1964.633a
AN1964.632c

The Museum holds a representative collection of the types of monochrome and bichrome painted sherds found at the site of Pirak.[1] Almost all the pottery bears intricate geometric patterns, usually formed by variations of intersecting diagonal lines to make a series of lozenges on a red, pinkish or creamy ware. The pots are both wheelmade and handmade, though the latter seem to predominate.

Pirak lies near Mehrgarh and like it was occupied first in the pre-Indus period and then abandoned during the mature phase of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Then, after a period of desertion, it was reoccupied in the Late to post-Indus period from the second quarter of the second millennium BC to the early part of the first millennium BC. As Pirak is one of the most scientifically excavated sites of the period, it is of great value for the study of the aftermath of the Indus culture. Other neighbouring sites have revealed bronze and copper implements comparable with Anatolian and Iranian ones, both areas with which this region had close contacts. Comparisons may also be drawn with copper and iron smithery at Ahar in Rajasthan and Allahapur in the Ganga Valley. Taken together, the sites of this period have transformed our understanding of the legacy of the Indus Valley Civilisation – not as a civilisation that met an inexplicable demise, but as one that was succeeded by several interconnected regional centres with their own specialised industries and crafts.

1 Compare J. F. Jarrige et al., *Fouilles de Pirak*, 2 vols., Fouilles du Pakistan 2: Commission des Fouilles Archéologiques, Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1979, vol. 1, frontispiece, and vol. 2, monochrome examples: figs. 43–9; see also bichrome types: vol. 2, figs. 50–6.

24 Forty Megalithic pots, stands and lids

c.1500–200 BC
From Megalithic burials in Andhra Pradesh
Red Ware and Black-and-Red Ware

24.1 SMALL POT, LID WITH FINIAL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 8, diam. 14 cm; lid H. 9.5, diam. 15.2 cm
EAX. 2393 a–b
Pot and lid are labelled 'Raigir XVIII found outside cist on south side'. The pot has a small crack
Graffiti on the lid and base, which perhaps did not belong together

24.2 SMALL POT, LID WITH FINIAL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 8.5, diam. 13.5 cm; lid H. 9, diam. 15.5 cm
EAX. 2394a–b
Lid labelled 'Raigir IV inside cist'. Base labelled 'Raigir XXIII inside cist'. No graffiti.
Tip of finial broken off

24.3 SMALL POT, LID WITH FINIAL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 8.5, diam. 14.5 cm; lid H. 8, diam. 16 cm
EAX. 2395a–b
Pot labelled 'Raigir XI outside cist'. No graffiti. No label on lid. Rim of pot chipped

24.4 SMALL POT, LID WITH FINIAL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 8, diam. 12 cm; lid H. 14, diam. 14.5 cm
EAX. 2396a–b
Lid labelled 'Raigir XVIII'. Base not labelled.
Graffiti on lid and base, which perhaps did not belong together. Small crack on pot

24.5 SMALL POT, LID WITH FINIAL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 9 cm, diam. 13.5 cm; lid H. 13.5 cm, diam. 15 cm
EAX. 2397a–b
Pot labelled 'Raigir XVIII'. Lid labelled 'Raigir XXIII'. Labels show position in cist. Graffiti on lid, not base. Edge of ring base chipped
Thermoluminescence testing of the lid indicated that it was last fired between 1600 and 200 BC[1]

24.6 SMALL POT WITH CONCAVE LID
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 9, diam. 13.5 cm; lid H. 5, diam. 14.5 cm
EAX.2398
Pot labelled 'Raigir XXII inside cist'. No graffiti.
Fine cracks in lid

24.7 SMALL POT WITH CONCAVE LID
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 9.5, diam. 9.5 cm, lid H. 4.5, diam. 10 cm
EAX. 2399a–b
No marks. Chip in rim of lid and pot

24.8 SMALL POT WITHOUT LID
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 7 cm
EAX.2400
Labelled 'Raigir XII inside cist'. No graffiti

24.9 SMALL POT WITHOUT LID
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 7 cm
EAX.2401
Labelled 'Raigir VI inside cist'. No graffiti. Very cracked and abraded

24.10 SMALL POT WITHOUT LID
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 8 cm
EAX.2402
Pot labelled 'Raigir XXI inside cist'. No graffiti. Badly damaged. Contains small fragments

24.11 SMALL POT WITH CONVEX LID
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 7, lid diam. 3 cm
EAX.2403
Graffiti on pot. Labelled 'Raigir XII inside cist'. Pot has damaged rim

24.12 PLAIN BOWL WITHOUT LID
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 7 cm
EAX.2404

24.13 HALF OF A BROKEN BOWL CONTAINING SMALL FRAGMENTS
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 7 cm
EAX.2405

24.14 CONCAVE LID
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 3.5 cm
EAX.2406
Labelled 'Raigir XXII Inside cist, away from pot'; damaged

24.15 LID WITH FINIAL
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 15 cm
EAX.2407
Labelled 'Raigir XIV'; label obscure and torn. No graffiti. Labels show position in cist. Damaged

24.16 LARGE LID WITH FINIAL
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 18, diam. 14.75 cm
EAX.2408
Labels show position in cist

24.17 LARGE POT
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 17 cm
EAX.2409
Labels show position in cist; badly damaged

24.22 24.30 24.31 24.33

24.40 24.21 on 24.18

24.18 RING STAND WITH CONSTRICTED WAIST
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 8.5, diam. 12.5 cm
EAX.2410
Labelled 'Raigir XI inside cist', no graffiti

24.19 LARGE FLAT DISH
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 7 cm
EAX. 2411

24.20 POT
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 14 cm
EAX.2412
Graffiti; badly damaged

24.21 LARGE JAR
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 26, diam. 20 cm
EAX.2413
Labelled 'Raigir XXII inside cist'. Graffiti. Hole inside

24.22 MEDIUM JAR
Red Ware
H. 20, W. 17 cm
EAX.2414
Graffiti. Slight crack around neck

24.23 MEDIUM BOWL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 10.5 cm
EAX.2415

24.24 MEDIUM URN
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 21 cm
EAX. 2416
Faint graffiti. Irregular black stain on base

24.25 MEDIUM URN
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 22 cm
EAX.2417
Labelled 'Raigir X outside cist'; faint graffiti
Badly damaged rim. Black blotches on body; contains fragments

24.26 MEDIUM URN
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 23 cm
EAX.2418
Faint graffiti

24.27 LARGE BOWL
Red Ware
H. 14, diam. 23 cm
EAX.2419
Graffiti. Slight crack in base

24.28 LARGE RING STAND
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 15, diam. 19.5 cm
EAX.2420
Graffiti. Labelled 'Raigir XVIII outside cist'

24.29 LARGE RING STAND
(not illustrated)
Red Ware
H. 16.5 cm
EAX.2421
Graffiti
Two sets of faint incised bands

24.30 MEDIUM POT
Red Ware
H. 19, diam. 19 cm
EAX.2422
Labelled 'Raigir XX outside cist'. Good condition

24.31 LARGE POT WITH FLATTENED BOTTOM
Red Ware
H. 19 cm
EAX.2423

24.32 SMALL POT
(broken)
Red Ware
H. 11 cm
EAX.2424
Labelled 'Raigir XX outside cist'. Deep cracks in rim

24.33 MEDIUM POT
Red Ware
H. 16 cm
EAX.2425
Labelled 'Raigir XX outside cist'

24.34 SMALL CONVEX LID
Black-and-Red Ware
diam. 10 cm
EAX.2426

24.35 MEDIUM CONVEX LID
(not illustrated)
Black-and-Red Ware
diam. 11.5 cm
EAX.2427
Slightly cracked

24.36 MEDIUM CONVEX LID
(not illustrated)
Red Ware
diam. 12 cm
EAX.2428

24.37 MEDIUM CONVEX LID
(not illustrated)
Red Ware
diam. 13 cm
EAX.2429
Upper surface crazed

24.38 LARGE CONVEX LID
Blackened Red Ware
diam. 16.5 cm
EAX.2430

24.39 LARGE BOWL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 10, diam. 26.5 cm
EAX.2431
Small label outside the pot reads 'Bowl, not necessarily pre-historic? Madras (probably Coimbatore)? Huddleston 192?'

24.40 GLOBULAR VESSEL
Black-and-Red Ware
H. 29.5, diam. 32 cm
EAX.7440

Black-and-Red Ware is one of the most abundant forms of pottery recovered from ancient Indian sites. The vessels have a black interior and lip with a red outer surface that is occasionally marked with black patches.[2] The larger pots, used for grain, water or as sarcophagi, are handmade and of a plain red ware. They are found with medium and small sized pots that are mostly of Black-and-Red Ware. These usually consist of dishes, lidded bowls, pedestalled bowls, tulip-shaped vases, conical vessels and jars of various sizes. The pots often have rounded, tapering or conical bases that would sit securely in the large numbers of ring stands that accompany them. Lids fit well: they are either tall and conical, featuring finials with a knob on top, or they are shallow bowls that could also serve as supping cups. On the whole these pots are wheel thrown, made from well-levigated red clay and fired to produce a distinctive burnished surface, often with random patches of red and black. They are seldom painted, although simple incised lines, the application of slip and burnishing serve to decorate the pots. In rare cases they exhibit signs of salt glazing.

Many pots also bear traces of graffiti. These have not been deciphered although it seems that some characters, such as a Brahmi 'ma' and various oblique lines, are common.[3] The marks were scratched on after firing, making it unlikely that they are potters' marks. Pots from a variety of graves and sites bear the same marks, indicating that these are not owners' marks either. The same marks also occur on pots of different shapes and sizes, which must have different uses, so it seems unlikely that the marks are meant to indicate the contents of the pots.

The ware has been found in excavations at some of the most ancient sites (for example, Harappa, Lothal, Rangpur, Rojdi and Surkotada). A white painted version is more commonly found at Chalcolithic sites in Central India and Rajasthan (for example Banas, Ahar and Navdatoli), and other variations are found throughout the North Indian plains from Uttar Pradesh (prominent sites include Chirand, Atranjikhera and Hastinapura) and widely in Bengal as well. However, it is with the Megalithic cultures of Peninsular India that this ware is most commonly associated. It is to this latter group that that the examples in this collection belong. Most of these pots come from excavations conducted at the sites of Motamari, Raigir and Bhongir in Telangana (a division of Andhra Pradesh) by Dr E. H. Hunt, a Hyderabad State medical officer. Like so many others interested in archaeology, he was fascinated by the Iron Age Megalithic burials in the area.[4]

The distribution of Iron Age burials in India is wide and spreads over a broad time frame. The burials have been found as far north as Burzahom in Kashmir,[5] Khandesh / Maharashtra in the northern Deccan and in the hills (such as Kotia in Allahabad district) south of the Ganga Valley. However, the greatest number of burials, and the most varied, come from Southern India. While some of the most remarkable Megalithic complexes have been found in Kerala (Kandanisseri and Kattampal), most are spread over Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, and they are especially profuse in Andhra Pradesh. They are understood to be representative of settled Iron Age cultures variously dated between 1500 and 200 BC. In fact, the dates established by the thermoluminescence testing of one of the pieces (the black lid 24.5 from the Raigir cists) in

24.5 24.1 24.4

and excarnation.[7] In the cemeteries outside the settlements the dead might either be cremated or inhumed and buried in a flexed position, head to the west. The pit grave was sometimes supplied with a frame of logs as a house for the dead. A round or rectangular stone enclosure was built around the grave and above it a barrow was erected (the rite of *Pitrimedha*). The ashes were brought in a vessel (*kumbha*). There also occurred the cremation of man with wife. Vessels accompanied both cremations and inhumations.

A horse was sacrificed on the occasion of the burial of a king or kshatriya. When one died far away from home he was

the Museum's collection has corroborated these dates. It was found to have been fired 2200–3400 years ago, that is, between 1600 and 200 BC.[6]

It is difficult to work out an internal chronology within the Megalithic clusters, as many different types seem to occur simultaneously and in the same place. Not all the Megalithic complexes have revealed ossuaries. Some of those that have appear to consist of chambers that contain single skeletons, while chambers containing multiple skeletons are found in other complexes. Sometimes remains are interred in urns or large terracotta troughs with multiple legs. Often the grave contains iron implements such as tools, weapons, pots, stands and tripods, as well as etched carnelian and other stone beads, and rarely objects in such metals as bronze, copper and gold. Almost always, however, the distinct Black-and-Red Ware is present. Presumably these grave goods were intended for use in the afterlife.

Ancient Indian texts are rich in references to burial practices and rituals. As noted above, burials seem to have been common in most parts of the subcontinent in the first millennium BC. The *Rig Veda* (X: 18) comprises a famous death hymn which tells the dead to return to mother earth, while the *Atharva Veda* (XVIII: 1–4) and *Shathapatha Brahmana* (XIII: 8, IV.5.2.13) give information on both burial

CIST, unopened. From EAST.
CIST CONTENTS. (South West corner)
Note POT,which contained the BONES of a CHILD,and
lying in front of the pot a large IRON KNIFE.
In the corner is a TRIDENT, inverted. (Compare Bowenlilly VII)
CIST, with pots outside it, from North.
Note copper BELL and BANDS, placed on
the roof of the cist, but found lying
slightly to the East of the cist, above

Figs. 31–33 | Details from a series of card sheets mounted with E. H. Hunt's photographs and notes on his excavations (Ashmolean Eastern Art Archive)

Fig. 34. Detail from a series of card sheets mounted with E. H. Hunt's photographs and notes on his excavations (Ashmolean Eastern Art Archive)

sometimes cremated, and a cenotaph was erected in his homeland. In other cases the body in a vessel with oil, or 33 bones of the skeleton, were sent home for cremation (*Baudhayanapitrimedha sutra* III: 6, 2). Interestingly, the South Indian epic Manimekhalai makes reference to burial practices, including burial in pots and in subterranean vaults and urns, in addition to cremation and excarnation. The following poem in an early Sangam text also records how some of these larger pots were used. The protagonist here is a recent widow:

> O potter that makest pots for the burial ground! Pity my plight and show kindness to her who, like a little white lizard clinging to the spokes of the wheel that turns beside the axle-pin of chariots, has in his [the husband's] company traversed for long the narrow and difficult paths [of life], and condescend to make the burial urn large enough to include her too.[8]

Several rock shelter paintings have been reported beside Megalithic burials. Although it is not possible to date these paintings with any certainty, their presence is tantalising. A group of paintings of four men in the hill region of Alankayam village, Velur district, shows one of them standing on the back of an animal (*vahana* / mount?) associated with a fish and symbols such as a trident, a sun and other signs. Another prominent painting depicts a large goat on the face of the hill at Nayanur village in Thirukkoyilur taluk, Villupuram district. Two men in combat are also painted in a cavern under the overhanging rock face of the Kudimiyanmalai hill in Pudukkottai district. There is a Tamil-Brahmi inscription nearby.[9]

The Buddhist tradition of interring relics and building stupas also goes back to these burial customs. Many stupas in the Deccan are found in close proximity to Megalithic burials. The dates of the Megalithic burial cultures in this region overlap with the earliest stupas.[10] It thus seems that the newly arrived Buddhist monks were consciously building their burial mounds at what may well have been sacred sites where the dead were already commemorated by the local population.[11]

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1 Thermoluninescence Analysis Report, Sample no: N105x93, by Oxford Authentication Ltd, 5 August 2005, suggests, on the basis of a sample taken from the inner rim of the lid, that the date of the last firing was between 2,200 and 3,400 years ago. For an analysis of this ware in India see H. N. Singh, 'Black and Red Ware, A Cultural Study', in D. P. Agrawal and D. K. Chakrabarti, eds., *Essays in Indian Protohistory*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1979, pp. 267–83.

2 The ware has been compared to a broadly similar ware from Egypt, where experiments showed that the body of the pot was covered with red ochre and burnished, filled with an unidentified organic substance and fired upside down, standing on its lip. The interior of the pot was therefore reduction fired, rendering it black.

3 For a collation of the most prominent symbols found in graffiti, see B. B. Lal,'From Megalithic to the Harappa: Tracing Back the Graffiti on Pottery', *Ancient India* 16, 1960, pp. 4–24. Lal identities 60 basic symbols, of which four are common to Harappan, Chalcolithic and Megalithic complexes and six are exclusive to Megaliths. These symbols had been studied previously by G. Yazdani, *Annual Report, Hyderabad Archaeological Dept.*, Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1915–16, pp. 9–10, and 1916–17, pp. 5–8.

4 E. H. Hunt, 'Hyderabad Cairns', *Journal of the Hyderabad Archaeological Society*, July 1916, pp. 180–223; 'Hyderabad Cairn Burials and their Significance', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 54, 1924, pp. 140–56, and 'Megalithic Burials in South India', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1933, pp. 508–10.

5 A. K. Sharma, 'Neolithic Human Burials from Burzahom, Kashmir', *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda*, 16/3, 1967, pp. 239–42.

6 The certificate's details are cited in n. 1 above.

7 See A. B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 32, part 11, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1925, reprinted Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970, p. 418; and W. Caland, *Die altindischen Todten – und Bestattungsgebräuche*, Amsterdam: J. Muller, 1896.

8 Cited by L. S. Leshnik, *South Indian Megalithic Burials: the Pandukal complex*, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974, p. 18, after Ayyar: '525', *Manimekhalai*, 6 (1940), pp. 67–8. See also K. R. Srinivasan, 'Megalithic Burials and Urn Fields in South *India* in the Light of Tamil Literature and Tradition', *Ancient India*, 2, 1946, pp. 9–16.

9 R. Nagaswamy, 'Recent Progress in Tamil Archaeology', *AR1A South and Southeast Asian Art and Archaeology Index*, 11, Part One, E. M. Raven and H. I. Lasschuijt, eds., *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002, pp.1xxv–1xcii.

10 F. R. Allchin, 'Sanskrit "Eḍūka" – Pāli "Eluka"', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Studies in honour of Sir Ralph Turner*, vol. 20, no. 1/3, 1957, pp. 1–4.

11 Recently reiterated by G. Schopen, 'Immigrant Monks and the Proto-historic Dead: The Buddhist Occupation of Early Burial Sites in India', in *Festschrift Dieter Schlingloff*, Reinbek: Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 1995, p. 276.

25 Two animal heads

c.700 BC–AD 200
Motamari, Andhra Pradesh

25.1 ANIMAL HEAD
(possibly of *Cervidae*)
Terracotta
L. 11.5 cm
EAX.235

25.2 ANIMAL HEAD
(possibly *Bovidae* or *Cervidae: Saiga tatarica?*)
Terracotta
L. 14 cm
EAX.236

PUBLISHED: E. H. Hunt, 'Hyderabad Cairn Burials and their Significance', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 54, 1924, pp. 140–56, fig. 1; L. S. Leshnik, *South Indian Megalithic Burials: The Pandukal Complex*, Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974, fig. 40, nos. 3–4; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 4

Adding to the curiousness of the assemblages recovered from Megalithic burials, the rarity of figural imagery – whether animal or human – should be noted. This may be due, of course, to the fact that very few settlements, as opposed to graves, have been excavated. A widespread culture such as this – which extended over such a long period of time and whose people were adept at manipulating and transporting large blocks of stone, proficient in manufacturing iron and other metal implements, and with developed lapidary skills and sophisticated pottery – must undoubtedly have produced images as well. However, these two heads are among the very few that are known. They are recorded as having been found in a sarcophagus at Motamari, near Hyderabad, by E. H. Hunt in the 1920s or 30s.

Although both these heads are damaged, they may have belonged either to complete animals, such as the more complete piece that was found inside an elaborate burial at Serupalli, Mahbubnagar district, or, like a fragmentary bovine head that was found luted to a sarcophagus at Peddamaruru,[1] they may have been made simply as heads. One of them, with its pointed head and straight sweptback horns, seems to be an antelope. The other has a distinctive appearance, with a straight-sided jaw and raised nasal region that resemble those of a saiga, although it might also be a bull.

1 They are illustrated in V. V. Krishna Sastry, *The Proto and Early Historical Cultures of Andhra Pradesh*. Archaeological Series no. 58, Hyderabad: Government. of Andhra Pradesh, 1983, pl. 34.

26 Six pots and one set of bones from graves in the Nilgiri Hills

c. Fourth century BC – third century AD
Kerala and Tamil Nadu
Red terracotta

26.1 SEPULCHRAL URN
Red terracotta
Nilgiri Hills, South India
H. 16, diam. 18.4 cm
EAX.2495
Gift of the Revd. J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
Label (still adheres to the side): '215 Sepulchral urn or chatty found in a cairn on the Nilggiri (Neelgherry) Hills, near the coast of Malabar. Rev. J. Griffiths, Madras, MA ChCh 1844'

26.2 SEPULCHRAL POT
Red terracotta
Nilgiri Hills, South India
H. 12.7, diam. 15.7 cm
EAX.2496
Gift of the Revd. J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
An old label that lists this as number 2 on Griffiths' original list still adheres to the side

26.3 SEPULCHRAL URN
Red terracotta
Nilgiri Hills, South India
H. 13, diam. 14.5 cm
EAX.2497
Gift of the Revd. J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
An old label that lists this as number 3 on Griffiths' original list still adheres to the side

26.4 SEPULCHRAL URN
Reddish-brown terracotta
Nilgiri Hills, South India
H. 5, diam. 8.2 cm
EAX.2498
Gift of the Revd. J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
Crudely modelled; ribbed at centre; flat bottomed; rim missing

26.5 SEPULCHRAL URN
Red terracotta (not illustrated)
H. 5.8, diam. 8.2 cm
Nilgiri Hills, South India
EAX.2499
Gift of the Revd. J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
Number 8 on Griffiths' original list; contained a metal bowl, his number 9. Broken: one large and about 15 small sherds of a large pot or 'chatty'.

26.3 26.2

26.6 BOWL WITH ROUNDED BASE
(possibly a pot lid)
Dark grey and rust terracotta
Nilgiri Hills, South India
H. 7, diam. 11.8 cm
EAX.2500
Gift of the Revd. J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
Wheel-turned; four pieces inside; broken at rim

26.7 CALCINED BONES OF AN ADULT
Nilgiri Hills, South India
EAX.2501
Gift of the Revd J. Griffiths, Madras, June 1844
Label: '... found with one arrowhead and portions of a knife' (these items now appear to be missing)

26.1 Lid (EATN.100) 26.6 26.4

The archaeological heritage of the Nilgiris is unusual. Numerous ancient burials which show a coherent cultural formation were excavated in the nineteenth century; there can be no doubt that these are related to other burial practices in nearby Andhra and Karnataka which are generally known as 'Megalithic'.[1] However, the parallels between the Nilgiri burials and other Megalithic sites in Southern India are more apparent in the late burials of the Early Historic Period. Thermoluminescence testing of a Red Ware potsherd in the Museum's collection (EAX.2499) indicated that it was last fired 1600–2500 years ago, that is, between 500 BC and AD 400.[2] This corresponds exactly with the accepted dates for the sites and goods associated with this burial culture.

Nilgiri burials are mostly on or near hilltops. They consist of a circular stone enclosure with several stone slabs placed parallel to one another at the centre. The graves usually contain vessels with a cup-like lid that contains cremated bones (such as the fragments in the Museum's collection), bronze bowls, mirrors, weapons and other iron implements, iron bangles and, occasionally, even gold ornaments and beads of various semi-precious stones and glass. Most of these pots are found together with terracotta figurines, large collections of which are preserved in the Chennai (Madras) Government Museum, the British Museum and the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin.[3]

These pots are typical of those found in the 'Megalithic' burials of both the Nilgiri and Coimbatore regions. They were found in the early nineteenth century. Old labels that still adhere to the sides make such statements as '215 Sepulchral urn or chatty found in a cairn on the Nilggiri (Neelgherry) Hills, near the coast of Malabar. Rev. J. Griffiths, Madras, MA ChCh [Christ Church, Oxford] 1844'.

Mostly poorly fired, they have a red to orange exterior; the clay body is grey when incompletely fired and red when the pot is matured. The clay is tempered with sand. The pots are wheel-turned with hand-modelled, rounded bases. Occasionally they are painted with concentric lines. Cat. 26.1, with a widely flaring mouth, was found containing human bones, sherds of another pot and a hollow perforated brass ball (2.6 cm in diameter), containing small pebbles to act as a clapper. Cats. 26.2 and 26.3 show luting at the juncture between the body and neck, suggesting that they were probably constructed in two stages. They are both decorated: Cat. 26.2 has a ribbed and cross-hatched neck and Cat. 26.3, with a chipped rim, has a row of notches just above the shoulder. It also has a 3 cm hole in one side. Cat. 26.5 bears some small cross-hatching as well.

Complete pots have demonstrated that these pots originally had small bowl-shaped lids, a design which is still to be found in Indian metal and clay utensils today. Cat. 26.6 was perhaps such a lid. The Museum also has a collection of calcined bones (cat. 26.7) that were found in one such sepulchral urn. The note accompanying these bone fragments says that it was found by: 'J Griffiths of Madras, June 1844.... The cairn had three stores, 5 feet long and 1 wide lying bare upon it, all pointing to the NE.' It further observes that one of the *chattis* (utensils) apparently also contained a triangular gold piece, which he describes as a 'link'. Together with the label is a very rough sketch of an iron tool that was presumably found with the bones. Another note says that a thin ring of white metal and a hand sickle were found with them. The present whereabouts of these items is not known.

26.7

1 J.W. Breeks, *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris*, London: India Museum, 1873, repr. Delhi: Cultural Publication House, 1983; A. Zagarell, 'The Megalithic Graves of the Nilgiri Hills and the Moyar Ditch', in *Blue Mountains Revisited: Cultural Studies on the Nilgiri Hills*, P. E. Hockings, ed., New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 23–73.

2 Sample no. N105x94, tested by Oxford Authentication Ltd. on 8 August 2005.

3 C. Wessels-Mevissen, 'Creative Legacy of the Nilgiri Hills: Terracotta Offerings from South Indian Megalithic Burials', in *Indian Terracotta Sculpture: The Early Period*, Marg 54/1, P. Pal, ed., Mumbai: Marg, 2002, pp. 24–35.

27 Painted bowl

500 BC–AD 200
Coimbatore region, South India
Terracotta with ochre decoration
diam. 10 cm
EAX.237

This bowl is a fine example of Russet-Coated Painted Ware[1] which, although initially thought to come only from Andhra, is now known to have spread over most of South India and northward to the Krishna–Tungabhadra and Godavari rivers. The bowl is probably from a grave, of a culture contemporary with, and not unrelated to, that which produced the 'Megalithic' pottery in the collection from Andhra Pradesh. Strictly speaking the ware is Early Historic, but it is found, especially in earlier layers, in contexts not unrelated to the Protohistoric Megalithic cultures. Later, this pottery is found alongside the so-called Rouletted and Arretine Ware of the first century BC to the first century AD. These painted wares are characterised by well-fired, finely made pots; they are variously decorated with geometric patterns and parallel lines formed by painting the unbaked pot with a kaolin slip after covering the entire pot with a red ochre (or russet) pigment. This piece is decorated all along the cavetto with ten parallel bands arranged in a swirling pattern.

1 Sir R. E. M. Wheeler, 'Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947, Megalithic and other cultures in Mysore State', *Ancient India* 4, 1947–8, pp. 180–310, particularly p. 236.

3

THE NORTHWEST

< Detail of Cat. 61.4

27A&B Rhyton on a centaur-shaped stand and bowl or ladle from Imit

27A RHYTON ON A CENTAUR-SHAPED STAND
Fourth–second centuries BC
Imit, Ishkoman valley (west of Hunza, north Pakistan)
Leaded bronze
H. 27.5 cm (after restoration); D. (rim) 16 cm
EA1963.28
Presented by the Executors of the Estate of Sir Aurel Stein, 1954

27B BOWL OR LADLE
Fifth–third centuries BC
Imit, Ishkoman valley (west of Hunza, north Pakistan)
Copper
H. 5.9 cm; D. (without handles) 8.1 cm, (with handles) 10.2 cm; D. (inside rim) 6 cm
EA1976.122
Presented by the executors of the Estate of Sir Aurel Stein, 1954

PUBLISHED: Sir A. Stein, 'Archaeological Notes from the Hindukush Region', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April 1944), pp. 14–16, pl. IIIa; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 5, col. pl. I; K. Jettmar, 'The Art of the Northern Nomads in the Upper Indus Valley', *South Asian Studies*, 7, 1991, figs. 1, 14; E. Errington and J. Cribb, eds., *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol*, Cambridge: The Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992, nos. 95–6 (entries by J. Boardman); J. Boardman, *The Diffusion of Classical Art in Antiquity*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1994, p. 149, fig. 4.95; D. Klimburg-Salter, *Buddha in Indien: Die frühindische Skulptur von König Asoka bis zur Guptazeit*, Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum and Milan: Skira, 1995, nos. 7, 9; J. Boardman, *The Greeks in Asia*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2015, pl. XXX. See also: K. Jettmar, 'Rock Carvings and Stray Finds in the Mountains of North Pakistan: Archaeology before Excavation', in M. Taddei, ed., *South Asian Archaeology: Fourth International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*, Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, 1979, vol. 2, pp. 917–26; B. A. Litvinskij, 'Pamir und Gilgit, kulturhistorische Verbindungen', in K. Jettmar, ed., *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan: Reports and Studies*, Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 141–9; R. Salomon, 'An Inscribed Silver Buddhist Reliquary of the time of King Kharaosta and Prince Indravarman', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 116 / 3, (1996), pp. 438–9, fig. 23; B. A. Litvinskij, 'Copper Cauldrons from Gilgit and Central Asia. More about Saka and Dards and Related Problems', *East and West*, 52 / 1–4 (2002), pp. 127–49.

The ancient metal vessels from the Mauryan / Achaemenid to Kushan periods found in northern Gandhara and Swat can be distinctly divided into two broad categories on the basis of their style and techniques. One group, to which this rhyton (Cat. 27a) and small cauldron (Cat. 27b) belong, shows a generally older form of bronzes that can be traced to protohistoric traditions of Nuristan and Bactria; this mixed with Achaemenid and Mauryan motifs and continued into the Early Historic period. Vessels of the second group include a greater proportion of Hellenistic and Roman styles and tend to be in silver.[1] Both these bronze objects were found when a portion of a hillside collapsed in the Imit region, in the Ishkoman valley west of Hunza in 1940. The objects were handed over to Sir Marc Aurel Stein[2] and thence by his executors to the Ashmolean Museum.

The bronze of the rhyton has a high lead content. Its horn appears to be hammered and decorated with cross incisions on its flat rim, and to have been made separately and riveted on to the centaur. Photographs reveal that prior to its restoration in the mid-twentieth century, this rhyton had larger rivets that fastened the horn to the centaur.[3] The body of the centaur-shaped stand is cast from a mould, except for the genitals which are modelled.

The 'centaur' is unusual because it possesses a human phallus-shaped spout. The human forepart holds a goat, fastened by a bronze pin running through its body and the palms of the hands, allowing it to swing freely – such that while pouring from the spout or tilted rhyton into a goblet, the goat would always hover above its rim. One wonders whether that held any specific symbolism, given that sheep, ibexes and goats were the predominant sacrificial animals of all the communities who could have used these objects.[4] The beard, low forehead and large lenticular eyes (which would likely have once been inlaid) are reminiscent of an early Mauryan or even Bronze Age style. However the anatomy of the body with its bold striations across the lower chest and prominent modelled chest is rather like the Kushan bronze Skanda, also from the same broad region (Cat. 57).

There is some definitional confusion in the literature and sometimes any drinking vessel with an animal head, irrespective of its shape, is called a rhyton. This is not strictly correct: rhyta are conical ceremonial drinking horns[5] which may or may not have a stand or an animal protome at the end. Rarely have ancient rhyta made of animal horn or ivory tusks survived, but several metal ones, of gold, silver and bronze, are thought to have originated in the wider Iranian world (which includes the Caucasus and Eurasian Steppes of the Scythians to the North, Bactria, Chorasmia, Sogdiana and the Tarim Basin on the East and the borders of Turkey and the Aegean to the West). They usually have a composite creature (such as a winged lion or horned lion) as a protome with a spout. Further, several types of rhyta survive. Some have a spout in the animal's chest, while others have protomes in the shape of animal heads where the spout is in the mouth.

Considerable scholarly energy has been exercised to establish which types came first and where they were made, though to little avail. However, this much is clear: this ancient form was already known in the Bronze Age to the Mesopotamians, Myceneans and Iranians, and it was adopted by Greek artists, who were making such vessels for their Thracian and Scythian clients even before they had begun to migrate toward Bactria with or after Alexander.[6] With the movement of Greek artists into Asia, there was a widespread mixing of techniques and styles. It is no longer possible to ascertain whether an object was made by a Greek or eastern hand; nor is the sort of nationalism sometimes attendant to that vein of scholarship particularly productive.

Having said that, different motifs were popular in the rhyta of different regions. Leonine motifs were particularly valued in Achaemenid and Parthian Iran, while bovine and equine ones (such as the

27B

centaur) were perhaps more popular in the Greek world than in the East. Composite creatures have deep significance in the ancient world. This hybridisation is invariably a sign of occupying both earthly and heavenly worlds, as mediating creatures transporting the spirit from one realm to another. This makes for particularly appropriate symbolism for any vessel that contained an inebriant or sacred liquid, the ingestion of which also transported the consumer from one state to another. Composite creatures were thus often placed at the entrances to sacred shrines or on sarcophagi.

The rather robust, thick bowl is in almost pure copper (Cat. 27b); its two ring handles and the protome were separately cast and attached. The horse-head protome was probably used as a handle, making the object like a ladle or one that comes firmly in the grip of a hand. It is shaped into a horse's head with a marked mane, raised forelock and prominent eyes. Of the other two demi-lunar handles, one is filled, like a lug, while the other is a loop. All in all the design structure of the vessel would work well for one that was like a large and heavy cauldron. This perhaps is a smaller copy of such a larger ceremonial vessel. The carbonised material found in the base indicated that it might have been used as an incense burner or lamp, even though the shape is more of a drinking-vessel.[7] The interior is pitted with a honeycomb pattern. There is a slight thickening at the centre underside; perhaps the reinforced heavy bottom indicates that this vessel was placed on a fire for long periods.

J. C. Harle endorsed a suggestion that these objects might have belonged to the 'horse-people' (Greek: Assakenoi) who lived in the Buner / Swat area in the period of Alexander and later.[8] However, Karl Jettmar and Boris Litvinskij have since studied these vessels extensively and illustrated them as proof for other, much older horse-riding tribes, such as the Shaka migration to India via the Pamir.[9] The sympathetic treatment of the goat in the rhyton shows awareness of the older Scythian style of animal modelling. The small cauldron belongs to a larger group from the Pamir, where they were found in cemeteries of the Shaka kurgans. These, in turn, bear similarities to cauldrons recovered from Southern Siberia, the Volga region and Harguš, all of which are dated to the fifth century BC.[10] In Jettmar and Litvinskij's studies these objects fit firmly within a much larger archaeological story of the migration of the Indo-Aryans and their mixing with Dardic tribes in the eighth century BC. By the second century BC significant Shaka populations started moving into Gilgit and Kashmir, and these objects must have been secreted away in the turbulence that accompanied the invasions of the Yueh Zhi or some other tribe. These motifs and types of metal casting were obviously highly valued and emulated; the same form was translated into different materials across the nomadic world, from Bulgaria to Swat.[11]

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1 For a detailed study of this latter group see Martha Carter, *The Arts of the Hellenized East: Precious Metalwork and Gems of the Pre-Islamic Era*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2015.

2 Recorded in Aurel Stein, 'Archaeological Notes from the Hindukush Region', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, April 1944, pp. 14–16, pl. 111a.

3 None of this fastening is now visible and the small rivets are modern.

4 Pivoted elements in metalware remained fashionable in the region, even in the hands of Greek silversmiths, e.g. for the articulated eyes of a Dionysiac emblema in a Seleucid Bactrian dish. See M. Carter, *The Arts of the Hellenized East*, 2015.

5 See, for instance, a gold Scythian plaque with a pair of men hovering around a rhyton, recovered from Kul Oba in southern Russia (fourth century BC) and now in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, illus.: http://iratta.com/materials/skify/15813-voennye-obychai-skifov.html; and a rhyton depicted being used on a painted Greek pot: https://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/58183/. A third example, on a dish from Dera Ismail Khan in the Northwest Frontier, British Museum no. 1937,0319.1, shows a man drinking from one: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=248381&partId=1&people=37950&peoA=37950-3-9&sortBy=imageName&page=1; this is almost identical to how a rhyton is shown being used by a man in the Roman paintings of Herculaneum, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scène_de_banquet,_fresque,_Herculanum.jpg (all examples accessed 16 May 2018). Each of these scenes shows a different way in which a rhyton could be used: to drink from its mouth, to fill a phial from its spout or, in the last two examples, to allow its liquid to pour directly into a mouth.

6 S. Ebbinghaus, *Rhyta with Animal Foreparts in the Achaemenid Empire and Their Reception in the West*, University of Oxford dissertation, 1998 (unpublished); S. Ebbinghaus, 'Between Greece and Persia: Rhyta in Thrace from the late 5th to the early 3rd century BC', in G. Tsetskhaladze, ed., *Ancient Greeks West and East*, Leiden, 1999, pp.385–425; R. Ghirshman, 'Notes Iraniennes XI, Le Rhyton en Iran', *Artibus Asiae*, 25 / 1, 1962, pp. 57–80; Z. Hacatrian and A. Z. Markarian, 'I Rhyta di Erebuni nel contesto dell' arte achaemenide e Greco-persiana', *Parthica*, 5, 2003, pp. 9–20; H. Hoffmann, 'Persian Influence on Greek Rhyta', *Antike Kunst* 4, 1961, pp. 21–6; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, 'The Iranian Wine Horn from Pre-Achaemenid Antiquity to the Safavid Age', *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, 10, 1996, pp. 85–139.

7 Two C-14 dates for the carbonised material offer 400–200 BC and 500–100 BC: see Chandra Reedy in Errington and Cribb, eds., *The Crossroads of Asia*, Appendix, p. 256.

8 Harle and Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, 1987, p. 6.

9 See B. A. Litvinskij, 'Copper Cauldrons from Gilgit and Central Asia: More about Saka and Dards and Related Problems', *East and West*, 52 / 1–4 (2002), pp. 127–49, with further bibliography.

10 K. Jettmar, 'The Art of the Northern Nomads', *South Asian Studies* 7, 1991, fig. 2; L. I. Albaum and B. Brentjes, *Wächter des Goldes: Zur Geschichte und Kultur mittelasiatischer Völker vor dem Islam*, Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1972, p. 68, fig. 33, with accompanying finds.

11 The well-known Scythian cauldrons are larger versions of the same, also often with animals attached vertically to their walls. Compare V. Schiltz, ed., *Or des Scythes: Trésors des musées soviétiques*, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1975, no. 89: a hemispherical tripod cauldron with horizontal hoop handles, like the cups, and vertical goats from near Alma Ata, Central Asia; and no. 163: 'Sarmatian' from near Rostov, the goats up under the rim and the cauldron on a stand.

28 Head of a cow

Third–second centuries BC
Taxila area
Terracotta
H. 6.5 cm
EA1967.92
Acquired by transfer from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

Collected in the Northwest Frontier, this fragmentary head of a cow with pierced mouth and nostrils and incised lozenge-shaped eyes shows modelling akin to Mauryan examples seen in the Mathura region.[1] This shape of eye is typical of Mauryan period workmanship and is seen on a large body of animal figures (mostly bulls and elephants) that must, for lack of any other explanation, have been used as toys. Although Marshall's dating of the stratigraphic layers of the site has been revised in the light of later scholarship, his important observation that the arts and crafts of Taxila drew their inspiration from the Gangetic plain in the Mauryan period is evident from pieces such as this.[2] Furthermore, it seems that while diverse cultural influences (prominently Hellenistic, Parthian and Scythian) were exhibited from the first century BC onward the bulk of the more popular terracotta art facts recovered from this period between the fourth century BC and the first century AD demonstrate that the civilisation in the northwest was, in its foundations, cultural a part of North India.

1 While contemporary Gangetic Valley pieces are often reduction-fired to a grey colour, fired northwestern terracottas are mostly red to orange

2 J. Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations, 1913–1934*, 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19 vol. 2, pp. 440, 454–58.

Fig. 35 | Taxila, Sirkap: Blocks 2A and 3A, view of fourth stratum (Photo: AS1)

29 Twenty-two fragmentary female figurines

Third century BC–first century AD
Northwest Frontier plains
Terracotta

29.1
H. 15.8 cm
EA1958.3
Gift of E. M. Scratton

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 6

29.2
H. 3.7 cm
EA1958.4
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.3
H. 7.6 cm
EA1958.5
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.4
H. 7.4 cm
EA1958.6
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.5
H. 6.8 cm
EA1958.7
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.6
H. 5.5 cm
EA1958.8
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.7
H. 6.2 cm
EA1958.9
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.8
H. 5.7 cm
EA1958.10
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.9
H. 6.8 cm
EA1958.11
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.10
H. 9.8 cm
EA1958.32
Gift of E. M. Scratton

29.11
H. 10.6 cm
EA1958.42

29.12
H. 6.6 cm
EA1958.48

29.13
H. 6.4 cm
EA1958.49

29.14
H. 6.5 cm
EA1967.63
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

29.15
H. 5 cm
EA1967.67
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

29.16
H. 5.1 cm
EAX.188

29.17
Inscribed 'S.D.' (probably Sar Dheri) on back
H. 2.6 cm
EA1985.22
Gift of Douglas Barrett

29.18
H. 5.4 cm
EA1985.23
Gift of Douglas Barrett

29.19
H. 6.3 cm
EA1985.24
Gift of Douglas Barrett

29.20
H. 6.7 cm
EA1985.25
Gift of Douglas Barrett

29.21
H. 5.2 cm
EA1985.26
Gift of Douglas Barrett

29.22
H. 5.7 cm
EA1985.27
Gift of Douglas Barrett

29.1

29.2

29.3

29.6

29.7

29.4

29.5

29.8

29.10

Figures of this type come from a variety of sites in the Northwest Frontier plains, including Peshawar (at Charsada, principally in the environs of the ancient mounds of Sar Dheri and Shaikhan Dheri) and Taxila. All the figures of this type retain the same general size and basic form; their flattened bodies have an exaggerated voluptuous bottom and a single tapering stump representing the legs. Further, they are all characterised by similar features: short outstretched arms, pinched noses and split pellet eyes that resemble cowries. When complete, the figures bear small pellets for breasts (which may be heightened with a hole to indicate the nipple). The separation of the legs is indicated only by an incised line on the stump, and with an incised triangle for the pudendum; sometimes the navel is shown prominently by a small pellet that is either pierced or marked with a small incised cross.

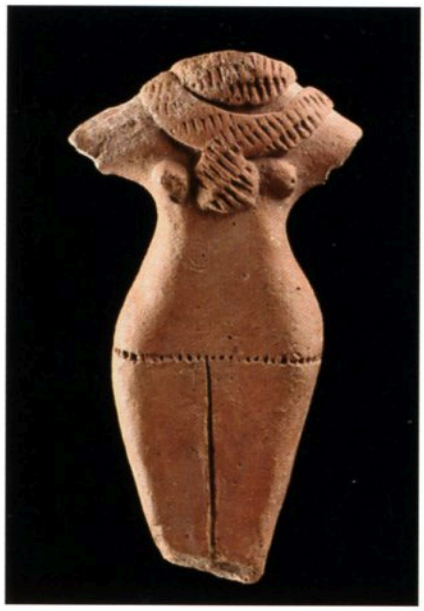
The artisans who made these images expressed their creativity through the variety of hairstyles and ornaments, which show tremendous diversity in their details. Thus turbans, crowns, headbands, ear ornaments and pendants appear in various styles; some stippled, incised or stamped with circlets and others decorated with appliqué leaves, *chakras*, pellets and flowers. Some pieces also have a few lines painted in black pigment.

Excavations have demonstrated that these figures continued to be made from the early third century BC until the second century AD.[1] The workshop in Charsada seems to have produced many of the more sophisticated figures, possessing more ornamentation and a wide variety of floral headdresses. The type may be compared with similar figures that are found all the way from Chalcolithic eastern Iran to Early Historic Indian terracottas from the Gangetic plains.[2]

In his report on the excavations at Taxila, Marshall called such figures a 'primitive mother goddess' type.[3] However, the doubtful appellation of 'baroque ladies' bestowed on them by Wheeler (who excavated a significant assembly of such figurines at Charsada in 1958) was to become more current.[4] The rather contrary descriptions of ''primitive' and 'baroque' for the same type of objects suggests that such descriptive terms are perhaps more reflective of the authors' own preconceptions.

No conclusive explanation exists either for the possible use of such artefacts, nor for their peculiar shape. Clearly, since these images cannot stand up on their own, they must have been stuck into the

29.11



29.12

29.13

29.14

29.15

29.16

ground or some similar support, presumably to serve a ritualistic purpose. While it seems natural they would originally have been placed upright in the earth, one can hypothesise about alternatives: for example, as images stuck in pots filled with grain, as shown in post-Mauryan terracotta plaques from the Ganga Valley, or held in the hand and decorated, as puppets used as offerings. It is also worth noting that this type of image is sometimes found as part of the 'ritual tanks' discovered at Taxila.[5] The most elaborate of these shows the goddess attached to a shrine in the middle of a small rectangular terracotta tank, with steps leading up to the shrine from the base of the trough. In any event it is likely that these figurines were used in popular cultic worship, the nature of which may eventually become clearer with further discoveries.

Fig. 36 | Ritual terracotta tank, with goddess and shrine. Sirkap, Stratum 11, from court of Block A. 11.12 × 11 in. (Marshall, Taxila, pl. 136, fig. 158)

29.17

29.18

29.19

29.20

29.21

29.22

1 For a discussion of their da]ting and excavation, see A. H. Dani, 'Shaikhan Dheri Excavations (1963–64)', *Ancient Pakistan*, II, 1965–6, pp. 46–47, pls. XXIV–XXVII, where they are dated from Bactrian Greek through to late Kushan layers; this follows on from the work of Wheeler, in his *Charsada: A Metropolis of the North-West Frontier*, 1962, and D. H. Gordon, 'Terracottas from Sari Dheri, NWFP', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, LXII, 1932, summarised again with some further illustrations in 'The Age of Frontier Terracottas', in *Iraq*, vol. V, 1938, pp. 85–8, pls. VI–IX, and 'Early Indian terracottas', *JISOA*, XI, 1943, pp. 136–95.

2 Coomaraswamy noted the parallels with Proto-Historic Indus Valley and Mesopotamian figurines along with the similarity in ornament, particularly the channavīra (the jewelled bands worn over the shoulders that intersect the breasts), with contemporary statuary from Bharhut, Besnagar and Taxila, in A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Archaic Indian Terracottas', *Jahrbuch für Prähistorische and Ethnographische Kunst*, Leipzig, 1928(a), pp. 64–76, reprinted in *From Riverbanks and Sacred Places*, exhib. cat., Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1977, p. 8. The latter publication also illustrates similar figures (nos. 1–4). Others are known from several collections, such as the V&A Museum, London, no. IM 29–1939, published in G. Michell et al., *In the Image of Man: The Indian perception of the Universe through 2000 years of painting and sculpture*, exhib. cat., London: Weidenfeld and Arts Council of Great Britain, 1982, fig. 53, and in A. G. Poster, *From Indian Earth: 4,000 Years of Terracotta Art*, exhib. cat., Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1986, p. 116; also see P. Pal, *Indian Sculpture*, 2 vols., Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986, pp. 129–30, among others.

3 See Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pl. 132, figs. 1–8.

4 See Wheeler 1962, *op. cit.*, pls. XX–XXV, and Dani 1965–6, *op. cit.*, pp. 46ff., pls. XXIV–XXVII.

5 Marshall 1951, *op. cit.* pl. 136, figs. 153–63.

30 Female figurine

Third–second centuries BC
Northwest Frontier
Amber
H. 5.4 cm
EA2000.114

This unique image in amber was reportedly found west of the Indus, in the Northwest Frontier or Afghanistan. The piece represents a typical Early Historic female type popular from the Mauryan period in the northern half of the subcontinent. The figure stands with her head held at an angle facing upward, surmounted by a decorative band. Looped braids fall down to her hips at the back, and the front shows her standing with arms akimbo wearing a thickly pleated *dhoti* around her broad hips. Her ornaments include the usual disc-shaped earrings, a long necklace which falls below and encircles her navel and two shorter collars.

Images in this style are crucial in re-evaluating the role of mainland Indian influences in the northwest before the first century AD. This iconography traverses a wide geographic and temporal span, and for the most part is seen only in small portable objects. The style of the images and iconographic predilections in the northwest compare closely with the assemblage of excavated materials across the north Indian plains extending roughly as far as Mathura; southeast of Mathura the styles and types are more varied.[1]

However, this piece is important for another reason too. We now know that there were several important sources for amber in antiquity, none of which were in the Indian subcontinent. Highly valued by the Romans, we know that its sources in Sicily had dried up by the first century AD, if not earlier. Amber was then imported from the Baltic region, over trade routes dating from the Scythian, Hellenistic and Seleucid times – and, in fact, routes via the Black Sea that had been used since the late Bronze Age. Small inlays of amber have been found at Taxila from the first century AD. Amber has also been discovered in use at Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan, which has yielded dates more consistent with the late Mauryan style of this figurine.

1 Comparable images in terracotta, also of the late third to second centuries BC, can be seen in various collections and are widely published: S. P. Gupta, *The Roots of Indian Art: A Detailed Study of the Formative Period of Indian Art and Architecture – 3rd and 2nd Century* BC, New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1980, pls. 78a–b; R. C. Sharma, *The Splendour of Mathura Museum and Art*, Mathura: Government Museum, 1976, 2nd rev. ed., New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1994, fig. 10.

31 Two female figures

31.1 (obverse and reverse)

31.2 (obverse and reverse)

First century BC–first century AD
Northwest Frontier
Leaded bronze

31.1
H. 10.3 cm
EA 1973.7

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 9; J. Cribb and E. Errington, eds., *Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol*, Cambridge: Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992, no. 113; J. C. Harle, 'An Early Indian Metal Figure', in T. S. Maxwell, ed., *Eastern Approaches*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 74–80; J. C. Harle, 'Artefacts from the Historical Period from Bannu', in *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, Part 2, Rome, 1990, pp. 643–55, fig. 9.

31.2
H. 10 cm
EA 1993.18

Both these hollow-cast bronze figures[1] show the typical Early Historic goddess standing with the right arm akimbo, her left foot slightly advanced and wearing a large headdress. None of the known pieces of this type is intact.[2] However, it seems that they all carried the weapons ubiquitous in contemporary Indian terracotta figurines or wore prominent sprigs of foliage in their headdresses. Their looped braids fall to the middle of their backs, a long necklace extends down to the navel and a lower garment or dhoti, one end of which is held in place by the figure's left hand, is tied high on the waist. These figures stand on a thin bronze plate and have deep holes drilled in the top of their heads to facilitate attachment to another surface or object. The usually accepted belief that they served as mirror handles has been questioned by During-Caspers and Harle, who suggested that these pieces might have served as furniture legs.[3]

Both pieces are heavily worn, although the copper patination and corrosion of EA1993.18 is far greater than the other. It is thought these statuettes come from Bannu as an almost identical piece was found there, though their ambit may well be wide enough to include the Punjab plains.[4]

Fig. 37 | Bronze figurine of goddess with weapons in her headdress. Probably Kaushambi, 1st century BC. Metropolitan Museum, New York (Photo: Metropolitan Museum)

32 Painted ivory statuette

Third to second century BC
Afghanistan
H. 10.9, W. 2.7, diam. 1.5 cm
EA1993.386

A small group of such ivory statuettes, all of women standing nude with their arms by their sides and legs joined together, has been found in the Northwest Frontier and Afghanistan. Almost all are identical, with rounded faces (at times marked with a *bindi* or *tilak*), sometimes with three folds in the neck and a slightly swollen womb. Some of the better preserved pieces, such as this one, have traces of red and black pigment marking out their eyes, hair, the *bindi* and the jewelled crossband, or *chhanavira*, worn on the torso.

The exact find spot of this piece is not known, but it is surmised that it was found in Afghanistan.[1] Other examples are known from Taxila,[2] where they have been excavated at Sirkap and are thus dateable to the early first century AD, making them later than the Ai Khanoum example, which may be as early as the second century BC. The type can also be associated with other statuettes in the Ganga Valley and, judging from its general stylistic features, it is reasonable to assume that the iconography of these statuettes – like many other small-finds in the region, including contemporaneous terracottas – must derive from that region.

Finding such consistency in the depiction of these pieces in several examples now suggests that they may have had a cultic usage. However, some of them have sockets for arms or forearms that, held as they were by pins, would have been moveable. This would befit dolls, for instance, or other objects designed to be handled or played with, rather than to be reverentially placed to rest stationary in a shrine.

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1 See H. Ingholt, *Gandharan Art in Pakistan*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1957, figs. 353–4; C. Rapin, 'Fouilles d'Aï Khanoum VI', *DAFA*, XXXIII; the Ai Khanoum piece is also illustrated in F. Hiebert and P. Cambon, eds., *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures of the National Museum, Kabul*, London: British Museum Press, 2011, p. 115. Comparable pieces are also featured in M. Postel, *Ear Ornaments from Ancient India*, Bombay: Project for Indian Cultural Studies, Franco-Indian Pharmaceuticals, 1989, p.160. Another piece from the region is now in the Al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait (no. LNS 1381).

2 J. Marshall, *Buddhist Art of Gandhara*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960, pl. 17 a–b.

1 The technical analysis of the metal composition of EA1973.7 (as noted in earlier publications, cited above) is: nickel: 0.15 percent, iron: 0.35 percent, lead: 9.6 percent, tin: 14.6 percent, and the remainder copper. No detectable traces were found of zinc, arsenic, silver or antimony. A portion of the clay core of the same piece has also been thermoluminescence-tested by the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art, Oxford. The result showed the piece was approximately 2,000 years old (with allowance for error of 500 years on either side of the date).

2 At least six other figures of this type are known, one is in the Peshawar Museum (no. 678–M). The others have been noted by the author on the London art market between 1995 and 2005.

3 We may also recall the famous Indian ivory discovered at Pompeii (for colour illus., see C. Sivaramamurti, *The Art of India*, New York: Abrams, 1977, p. 168, fig. 102) and some other contemporary bone, ivory and conch-shell figures; all are crafted in the local styles of different Indian regions in the post-Mauryan period and would have been used for different decorative purposes: J. C. Harle, 'Artefacts from the Historical Period from Bannu', *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, Rome, 1990, Part 2, pp. 650–55, fig. 9; E. C. L. During-Caspers, 'The Indian Ivory Figure from Pompeii: A Reconsideration of its Functional Use', *South Asian Archaeology 1979*, Berlin: Reimer, 1981, pp. 341–53.

4 Another small post-Mauryan bronze figurine with the weapons clearly visible in the headdress is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (no. 1987.142.289): M. Lerner and S. Kossak, *The Lotus Transcendent, Indian and Southeast Asian Art from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991, pp. 53–4. However, this is likely to come from the Gangetic plains and to be a religious image in itself; it does not appear to be a handle or some other functional element.

33 Toy in the form of a *gana* or *yaksha*

First century AD
Afghanistan or Northwest India
Terracotta
H. 8.2 cm
EA1997.254

A potbellied dwarf with a large leering face is shown seated on a stool. Unusually, he is holding his penis with both hands, drawn together in his lap. His face is set with thick, unappealing features – rather like those of the dwarf *ganas* and *yakshas* commonly found across the subcontinent and fashioned into rattles, atlantes or, like this piece, toy carts. The iconographic types and styles of mainland Indian terracottas in this period thus spread across a wide area, with images such as this, reportedly from Afghanistan, demonstrating their Western extent.

Apart from the fact that goblins, dwarves, giants and demons, their faces often twisted into grimaces, have always amused and fuelled children's imagination, imagery such as this was also commonly employed in a talismanic role. Ancient Indian literature is replete with characters who afflict people with disease and cause children to die. Such characters were made into images both to propitiate and befriend them, as well as to ward off other evil spirits. They were thus often placed outside religious buildings or made into children's toys.

Fig. 38 | Squatting pot-bellied yaksha. Taxila: Bhir Mound, Stratum II, 1st century BC. H. 12 cm. Taxila Museum

34 Carved cylinder

First century BC–first century AD
Afghanistan
Bone
H. 3.4 (max.), W. 4.5 cm (max.)
EA1996.86

This fragment of a bone cylinder, possibly part of a cup or casket, is carved in relief with four standing figures of young women in various attractive poses of dalliance. Their costume and accoutrements are in keeping with the general style of figures of the first century BC to early first century AD. Several cups and other extraordinary ivory and bone objects in the same style as this piece have been discovered in Bengal. It is thus possible that this piece was manufactured somewhere in the Gangetic Valley, from where it travelled to the northwestern regions. This is also the generally received opinion on the celebrated ivories found at Begram in Afghanistan, which are also thought to have been made in India.[1] However in assessing the quantity of 'Indic' style pieces found in Afghanistan, particularly before the late first century AD, along with evidence of Indian-style construction techniques of the buildings at Taxila, it becomes clear that the northwest was as much a part of Indian artistic influences as it was Hellenistic at the time.

1 See S. Mehendale, *Begram: New Perspectives on the Ivory and Bone Carvings*, Ph.D thesis (in Near Eastern Studies): University of California, Berkeley, 1997.

35 Fragmentary lion

First century BC–second century AD
Northwest Frontier, Peshawar area
Terracotta
H. 3.9, L. 7 cm
EA1980.1
Gift of E. M. Scratton

Stylised lions have an important iconographic history in ancient India. They were prominently employed as heralds and as crowning capitals of free-standing pillars as well as in architectural pillars from Mauryan to Gupta times. Here, a skilfully modelled lion with a disproportionately large head is shown recumbent and curled up. The face is set with prominent bulging eyes, open jaw and an undulating forehead with a swollen bump. A schematised mane (indicated by a few bold incisions) flows into remarkably rotund, drawn up haunches. The lower jaw, ears, lower hind legs and forelegs are broken off. The animal is set on a mostly broken, flat base; this shows traces of spiral grooving on the underside, giving the impression that it must originally have been circular and might therefore have been a lid. Marshall found similar lion masks decorating the sides of vessels at the Parthian levels of Sirkap,[1] and it is possible that this lid might belong to the same type of pots.

1 Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pls. 131 k, l, m (nos. 252–4), and vol. 2, p. 436. Another such piece is in the Los Angeles County Museum, see P. Pal, *Indian Sculpture*, 2 vols., Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; University of California Press, 1986, vol. 1, p. 131 (see also his references: S. Czuma and R. Morris, *Kushan Sculpture: Images From Early India*, Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1985, p. 124; G. Montgomery and A. Lippe, *The Art of India: Stone Sculpture*, New York: Asia Society, 1962, p. 35; etc.).

36 Three fragmentary classical-style figures

*c.*First century AD
Terracotta

36.1 HEAD
Northwest Frontier
H. 3.8 cm
EA1967.95
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

36.2 HEAD
Taxila
H. 3.7 cm
EAX.164

36.3 LEGS
Northwest Frontier
H. 6 cm
EAX.169

These fragmentary heads show strong Hellenistic features in the softness of the facial features and the laurel wreath worn over the lady's head. Similar pieces were recorded from the excavations at Taxila (Sirkap)[1] from the phase of the Shakas and Parthians, and at Shaikhan Dheri which might have been occupied slightly later.[2] Such heads occur on complete, often nude figurines. Although the softness of modelling, greater amount of naturalism, surmounting of hair by a wreath or fillet and sometimes, the fine diaphanous drapery show the deep inroads that Hellenistic artistic influences were making in the northwest of India, the general posture, the nudity, the voluptuously modelled backs and the use of moulds betray the continuity of a tradition already well established in the region. This led Marshall to note that it may be more a case in which 'they reproduce under a classical guise, the Indian gods'.[3]

Such adaptability of the imagery to diverse iconographic needs becomes apparent when we compare complete figures of this type with Wheeler's 'baroque ladies' (cats. 29.1–22). At the same time one may also compare them to naked Aphrodite figures of the third to second centuries BC.[4] The pieces discovered by Marshall were all fragmentary; however, several museums house intact examples,[5] such as the figure from the Gordon collection in the British Museum[6] and another in the Brooklyn Museum.[7]

Fig. 39 | Terracotta nude goddess, front and reverse. Northwest Frontier, 1st century AD. H. 17.5 cm. Brooklyn Museum (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

1 Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 3: pp. 46–7.
2 A. H. Dani 1965–6, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 17–214, pls. XXVIII–XXX.
3 Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 448.
4 Referred to by Poster 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 117, n. 3, in which she compares the figure to the terracotta naked Aphrodite of *c.*200 BC from Taranto, in C. E Vafopoulou-Richardson, *Greek Terracottas*, exhib. cat., Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1981, no. 32.
5 Marshall 1960, *op. cit.*, figs. 31, 34 from the National Museum Karachi; Czuma and Morris 1985, *op. cit.*, no. 79 for a large intact figure in the Cleveland Museum of Art.
6 British Museum, OA 1967,2–21.8(31).
7 Poster 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

37 Four classicising fragments of figures

37.1, 37.2, 37.4

*c.*Second century AD
Gandhara, Northwest Frontier
Terracotta

37.1 FEMALE HEAD
(features badly abraded, trace of thumbprint on back)
H. 3.2 cm
EA1967.94
Transferred from the British Museum

37.2 MALE HEAD
H. 3.1 cm
EA1967.101
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

37.3 FEMALE HEAD AND BUST
*c.*100 BC–AD 200
H. 6 cm
EA1958.16
Gift of E. M. Scratton

37.4 HEAD
Probably from Sar Dheri
H. 3.9 cm
EA1967.68
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

37.3

These fragments belong to double-moulded figures, the body, when present, is hollow and the arms would originally have been solid. The more complete bust has a short fringe of curls held in place by a broad headband. A plaited pigtail falls on her back, which resembles other widely found nude figures in the region. The face is marked by soft features and shows strong Hellenistic influence. Several comparable figures have been found in the Gandhara region (see Cats. 36.1–3). More securely dated examples come from the excavations at Taxila.[1]

1 For instance, Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pls. 133, 147; L. Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style: A Study of Contributory Influences*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, fig. 126; A. H. Dani 1965–6, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 17–214, pl. XXXIII; D. H. Gordon, 'The Age of Frontier Terracottas', *Iraq*, vol. V, Part 2, 1938, pl. VIII, fig. 8; and J. Boardman, 'Greek Art in Asia', in E. Errington and J. Cribb, eds., 1992, *op. cit.*, no. 121, p. 117.

38 Male head

*c.*Second century AD
Northwest Frontier
Terracotta
H. 5 cm
EA1958.15
Gift of E. M. Scratton

This fragmentary head from Gandhara is heavily worn. It shows a male head with Hellenistic features under a conical (Scythian / Phrygian) cap. Tufts of hair escape from under the hat. The figure holds his head at an angle in an attitude that derives directly from Hellenistic sculpture and is seen in a number of examples from Gandhara.[1] Although a Phrygian cap is, strictly speaking, a tall conical hat with the peak turned over at the front, there is good reason to believe that this is a variation of the same motif.[2] Intact pieces have been found pressed from the same mould, which reveal a body with proportions of a boy. It is likely such objects were intended as votive offerings.

1 Most famously in the fourth to fifth century stucco head of the Buddha in the V&A Museum: widely published, including Czuma and Morris 1985, *op. cit.*, no. 120.

2 The Phrygian cap was frequently employed for the god Mithras in the northwest (Bactria), and is dateable in the region to at least 90–70 BC on the basis of a coin of Hermaeus. See A. D. H. Bivar, 'Mithraic images of Bactria: Are they related to Roman Mithraism?', in Ugo Bianchi ed., *Mysteriae Mithrae, Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l' Empire Romain*, 80, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979, p. 744, pl. IV.5.

39 Female figurine

First–third centuries AD
Gandhara; from an unspecified site in the Northwest Frontier
Terracotta
H. 7.9 cm
EA1958.155
Gift of P. S. Rawson

This hollow terracotta figurine shows a woman wearing a thick open cloak over a shirt; the garment is cut deep, leaving the upper portion of her chest exposed, and she wears a choker. Her face is framed by a series of spherical ornaments attached to her mantle, which is drawn tightly over her head. The portion below the waist and the lower parts of the arms are missing, and the head has been broken and mended.

The figure has been made using a combination of techniques. The face is certainly moulded, and the frontal portion of the body of the figure may have been initially impressed from a mould to give it a general outline. The back of the figure was made separately and then attached; the ornamentation is incised and appliqué.

40 Ten moulded and impressed potsherds

Probably first century BC–second century AD
From Rattapind Ali, Shahpur, Sargodha District, Punjab
Red ware
EAX.2888

Purchased in 1941 from Dr C. L. Fabri, this is one of only a few groups of sherds of moulded and stamped pottery recorded from Northern India at this date. Rattapind Ali (previously 'Ahli') is a site in Dewanpur Bhera near Sargodha in Western Punjab, Pakistan. The Museum also has a further five objects registered from this site. These include a large painted red sherd (EAX.2886), a sherd which is impressed with circles (EAX.2887), a rusted and broken iron pin (EAX.2889), two cowrie shells (EAX.2890) and a fragment of a bangle made from conch shell (EAX.2891), of a type that we know was popular from the Indus Valley Period onwards.

This stamped red ware is closely comparable to similar sherds excavated from the Scytho–Parthian and Kushan levels of Shaikhan Dheri[1] and Taxila.[2] It is in addition comparable to moulded pottery from Rang Mahal,[3] where the excavations have also revealed the moulds from which these pots would have been impressed. The moulds are shaped as open bowls with the decoration impressed in them in negative. They would have been used in much the same way as modern potters mass-produce wares using jigger-jollys, where clay would be pressed into the moulds which were fixed on to rotating potter's wheels.

Sherds from Shahpur Sargodha (previously also spelled Shapur) were first collected by Aurel Stein,[4] and these examples may have been collected at about the same time. It is possible that the technique and idea of moulded pottery is related to Roman *terra sigillata*, evidence for which was excavated in the far south of India at Arikamedu, Tamil Nadu. Recently a grand tradition of moulded pottery, dateable to between the first century BC and second century AD, has come to light from Bengal. A small selection of moulded pots from the Kushano–Sassanian periods has also been recorded from the northwest and Central Asia. Obviously this technique was widespread; although both the Bengali and Central Asian examples have figural decoration, the sherds in the Ashmolean bear only various kinds of floral motifs in the form of buds and rosettes.

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1 A. H. Dani 1965–6, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 17–214, figs. 39–40, p. 166.

2 Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 434–5 (and n. 2, in which Marshall suggests that the moulded wares in India may be related to the Roman Megarian, Arretine and Campanian wares that may have all originally derived from a common Hellenistic pottery tradition). Comparable pieces are illustrated, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pl. 131, pp. 244–5.

3 As suggested with similar excavated objects at Rang Mahal (Bikaner district, Rajasthan), see H. Rydh, *Rang Mahal: The Swedish archaeological mission to India 1952–54*, Acta Archaeologica Lundensia 40, no. 3, Lund, Sweden: CWK Gleerup Publishers, 1959. pp. 134–6, pl. 69.

4 Sir Marc Aurel Stein, *Archaeological Reconnaissances in North-Western India and South Eastern Iran*, London: Macmillan, 1937, pl. 1: Amra 14 and 8, RP 3 and 6.

41 Figurine of a seated woman

First century BC – third century AD
Gandhara
Terracotta
H. 5.8 cm
EA1994.81
Gift of Simon Digby

A woman wearing a cloth draped over her head and taken over her chest covering both shoulders is shown seated with her left knee drawn up to her chest (hidden beneath her drapery) and her folded right leg lying on the ground before her. Her left hand appears to be clutching her knee; her right hand is too worn to see if it holds anything. In Kushan Buddhist sculpture this type of dress and posture is usually reserved for ascetics such as Subhadra, the Buddha's last convert, or a figure usually identified as *parivrajaka*, or wandering monk.[1] Although there is, of course, no reason to believe this figure is Buddhist, the costume might be a type reserved for various classes of monks, ascetics and nuns. A similar treatment of the costume is found in terracottas from the Upper and Middle Gangetic Valley.[2]

1 W. Zwalf, *Catalogue of the Gandhara Sculpture in the British Museum*, vols. I – II, London: British Museum Press, 1996: nos. 230–1, pp. 205–7, where references to this iconography in Mathura and Gandhara are listed.

2 For an example from Ahichhatra, see S. C. Kala, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980, fig. 123.

42 Standing figure

First–third centuries AD
Afghanistan
Terracotta
H. 11.1 cm
EA1969.62
Gift of Peter Levi

This small moulded plaque shows a figure wearing a thickly pleated garment draped over the left shoulder, leaving the right breast bare. The figure is badly worn and a part of the head missing. Such figures, usually female, are found in vast quantities across Central Asian sites in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and, of course, in ancient Gandhara. Another piece in the collection, from Semthan in Kashmir, shows the eastern extent of this style (cat. 43).

It is not clear whom these figures represent. Suggestions have been made that they might depict such Central Asian goddesses as Anahita and Nana; however, this is questionable since none of the positively identifying iconographic attributes of those goddesses are found in these figurines. Stylistically their garments, drapery and, occasionally, ornaments may betray a resemblance to Hellenistic figures. Yet their profusion and localisation within Central Asia is perhaps better understood as a common Parthian to Kushan period style.

This piece was collected by the late Peter Levi S. J. (Oxford Professor of Poetry 1984–89) during his travels in Afghanistan in 1969. He mentions its acquisition in his travel account, *The Light Garden of the Angel King: Journeys in Afghanistan*, and records that it was bought in the bazaar at Ghazni and was said to come from the mound at Mazar-i Sharif. He also noted similar pieces from Russia and one at the Kunduz Museum.[1]

1 P. Levi, *The Light Garden of the Angel King: Journeys in Afghanistan*, London: Collins and Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972, reprinted London: Pallas Athene, 2000, p. 100 and n. 16. Levi draws a parallel with a published Russian example in C. Trever, 'Terracottas from Afrasiab', *Bulletin of the State Academy for History of Material Culture* 93, Moscow–Leningrad: State Editions Department, 1934.

43 Semi-draped female figurine

c. First century BC–first century AD
Semthan, Kashmir
Terracotta
H. 11.9 cm
EAI994.74

Two distinct styles of drapery are found among the figures at Semthan. This more scantily clad type of female figure wears heavy, naturalistic drapery, slung low to expose a curvaceous body. The bend in her knee (similar to Western classical contrapposto), the style and generally lesser degree of ornamentation indicate a local interpretation of the region's exposure to late Hellenistic imagery. At the same time, her more thickly set facial features invite comparison with Shaka and Kushan images. The crossband (*chhanavira*), worn with a central medallion over the chest, is reminiscent of jewellery commonly represented in terracottas from the northwest from the Mauryan period on. This piece was shown by thermoluminescence testing as having been fired between 1500 and 2300 years ago.[1]

Semthan, ancient Chakradhara, is situated in Kashmir, a region deeply connected with trading sites in three directions: the plains of the northwest (including Peshawar and Taxila) and the contiguous mountain valleys of Gilgit and Hunza, in the northeast to Tibet and Ladakh through the Kashmir Valley, and southward, with the plains of mainland India. These connections have been art historically relevant for much later ancient and medieval statuary and wall-paintings, and although there is a wide distribution of Early Historic sites in the valley,[2] none of them have been systematically excavated to be able to extend such a rich history of movement and migrations to that period. The limited excavations at Semthan have revealed several periods of habitation. Period II produced some Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), usually taken to demarcate the commencement of the Historical period in South Asia. The presence of NBPW also indicates contacts with the Gangetic plains, where this ware was commonly produced. The moulded terracotta plaques from the site are mostly of female figures and have usually been given early Kushan dates. While this dating is not secure archaeologically, stylistically the plaques do seem to show a great amount of Hellenistic influence rather than Indo-Parthian, Shaka or 'Shunga' influences. Yet their generally two-dimensional appearance and mould-made technique of manufacture would appear to indicate a regional sub-style of the first century BC to first century AD.

1 Thermoluminescence tested by the Oxford Research Lab., March 1994.

2 D. Mitra, ed., *Indian Archaeology, A Review 1981–82*, Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 16–19; and various editors, *Indian Archaeology, A Review*, 1983–4, p. 35; 1984–5, pp. 23–4; 1985–6, pp. 34–7; 1987–8, pp. 31–2. For a recent survey of terracottas from the northwest, see J. Siudmak, 'Terracotta sculpture from the Ancient Northwest', in *Indian terracotta sculpture: The Early Period*, P. Pal, ed., Mumbai: Marg Publications (also *Marg*, vol. 54), 2002, pp. 36–45, where the second type of figure from Semthan is illustrated. Also see J. Siudmak, 'Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir', in P. Pal, ed., *Marg*, vol. 40, 2, March 1989, fig. 21, p. 54; and J. Siudmak, *The Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir and its Influences*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pl. 2, pp. 32–6.

44 Double-sided jewellery mould

First century BC
From the environs of Akra or Bilot, Northwest Frontier
Dark grey soapstone
H. 4.5, W. 7.8 cm
EA1970.159
Purchased from the collection of Mrs Almond; found in the field December 1934

The obverse shows two roundels, each containing a pattern. One, divided into horizontal rows, is interspersed with a series of roughly incised lines, which form approximate semicircles, and dots. The other is more carefully carved, showing two concentric circles. The inner circle contains a series of radiating lines that connect its inner and outer rims, while the outer circle is surrounded by a series of prominent circlets. The reverse has only one pattern, that of an arrow in a crescent, which may perhaps represent a form of trident.

A channel through which molten metal (probably gold) would have been poured into the mould is carved into each of the three patterns. The object is, on the whole, coarsely made, but this in no way reflects on the quality of gold ornament that would have been cast from it: this would, of course, have been retouched, filed and finished to produce an attractive piece.

45 Various animal figurines

45.1

45.2

45.10

First century BC–third century AD
Terracotta

45.1 BULL
From an unrecorded site
H. 10.8 cm
EAX.2911
An old label found strung around the object reads, cryptically, 'Smith's Bull'

45.2 BULL
From an unrecorded site in the Northwest Frontier
H. 7 cm
EA1967.99
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

45.3 BULL
Sar Dheri
H. 5.8 cm
EA1967.72
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

45.4 BULL
Sar Dheri
H. 7 cm
EA1967.71
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

45.5 BULL
(not illustrated)
Peshawar area

H. 4.5 cm, L. 6.8 cm
EA1967.64
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

45.6 LIZARD
From an unrecorded site
L. 6.9 cm
EA1958.31
Gift of E. M. Scratton

45.7 HORSE
Akra
H. 14 cm
EA1967.77
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

45.9

45.11

45.6

45.7

45.8

45.8 HORSE
(with traces of the rider's leg over the saddle)
From an unrecorded site in the Northwest Frontier
L. 15 cm
EA1958.25
Gift of E. M. Scratton

45.9 BACTRIAN CAMEL
(missing right hind leg)
Sar Dheri
H. 6.6 cm
EA1967.70
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

45.10 BULL'S HEAD
(?)
From an unrecorded site in the Northwest Frontier
H. 5 cm
EA1958.30
Gift of E. M. Scratton

45.11 RAM'S HEAD
(?)
Taxila (?)
H. 5.5, W. 6.5, diam. 5.5 cm
EA1967.90
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

Although these objects are among the hardest to fit into a narrative of Indian terracotta art, they do nonetheless possess an undeniable specific *Zeitgeist*. They are not the 'timeless' types of terracotta figurines that allegedly continued without change across time and space; instead the spirit and style of these terracotta animals spreads across the entire northern half of the subcontinent over a definite period. This is, in fact, puzzling; for the figurines seem to resemble simple children's playthings, roughly made and easily replaced. And yet common themes, sizes, postures and, above

45.3, 45.4

all, their identical and distinctive stylisation (for example the same exaggerated humps on the shoulders of bulls, their angular and elongated hind legs, the patterning) do make one wonder if this uniformity is in fact an iconography.

The figures in the Ashmolean are mostly from the Northwest Frontier.[1] They include the all too common bulls – some featuring the exaggerated hump and others without – and saddled horses. Camels are rarer, and there is an unusual figurine which resembles a lizard or some other reptile.

There is some discrepancy in the dating of individual animal styles. At sites such as Sar Dheri the excavator has given a broader set of dates – mostly from the first century BC to second century AD – for many of the animal types discussed here. Härtel has provided a chronology based on the excavations at Sonkh,[2] where nearly identical animals are found. Tempting though it might be, his systematic findings from Sonkh, where it may now be possible to date animal figures with greater accuracy, cannot be applied to unstratified surface collections from the Northwest Frontier such as these. Similar pieces are also recorded at Kaushambi.[3]

1 Compare animal figurines from Sar Dheri in A. H. Dani 1965–66, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 17–214, pls. XXXV and XXXVI, pp. 77–93; Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 455–7, vol. 3, pl. 135. Further pieces from the Peshawar area are featured in Wheeler 1962, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–12. The prominently humped bulls also occur in Baluchistan.

2 Herbert Härtel *Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 years of a town in Mathura District*, Berlin: D. Reimer, 1993, pp. 164–73, 177–91.

3 A humped bull figure in the Lucknow Museum (no 49.104) is dated though to the fourth century AD, see S. C. Kala, *Terracottas of North India in the Collection of the State Museum, Lucknow*, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1993, p.163, pl. 299.

46 Seven fragmentary zoomorphic wheeled toys (wheels missing)

Probably second–fourth centuries AD
Terracotta

46.1 ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
From an unrecorded site
L. 10.5 cm
EA1958.26
Gift of E. M. Scratton

46.2 ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
From an unrecorded site
L. 10 cm
EA1962.44
Gift of Major P. C. Hailey

46.3 ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
Found in the Sar Dheri area
H. 9.5 cm
EA1967.74
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

46.4 ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
Found in the Sar Dheri area
H. 10.3 cm
EA1967.73
Transferred from the British Museum (Collection of Col. D. Martin)

46.5 ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
From an unrecorded site
L. 9 cm
EA1958.27
Gift of E. M. Scratton

46.6 ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
From an unrecorded site
EA1962.43
L. 10 cm
Gift of Major P. C. Hailey

46.7 HEAD OF A ZOOMORPHIC WHEELED TOY
(not illustrated)
Probably Taxila
L. 4 cm
EAX.155

46.1–5

Most of these toys are bird-like, though at times the heads are resemble those of animals. All are fantastic beasts, part animal, part bird and part fish, with pierced and incised eyes. The backs are flat and the undersides of the bellies rounded. The holes pierced through bodies were meant to accommodate axles for the fitting of wheels; the holes through the creatures' heads would have been threaded with string so that the toys could be drawn along on their wheels.

These were almost certainly toys. They have been found widely dispersed throughout India, at many sites such as Atranjikhera,[1] Taxila, Sar Dheri[2] and Kaushambi.[3]

46.6

1 R. C. Gaur, *Excavations at Atranjikhera*, Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, pl. LXXXVII, pp. 372–3.
2 See A. H. Dani 1965–66, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 17–214, pl. XL, pp. 104–6, where they are called 'bird chariots'. The V&A Museum has one of the first examples 'excavated' at Sar Dheri, by K. de B. Codrington in 1942 (no. IM 22–1943).
3 G. R. Sharma, 'Excavations at Kausambi, 1949–50', Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1969, pl. XLIV(B). These images clearly show bird-shaped toys, smaller and more realistically modelled than their northwestern counterparts.

47 Animal-headed female figurine (Naigamesha?)

Second–fourth century AD
Northwest Frontier plains
Terracotta
H. 10.2 cm
EA1985.29
Gift of Douglas Barrett

This standing female figurine is crudely modelled, with a large, upward-facing animal head (either bovine or equine) and large breasts. The face is marked with a bold incision for a mouth, and a prominent hole is driven into the belly to mark the navel. Just above the navel is a possibly symbolic mark of a downward pointing triangle – a compelling Indian symbol that usually indicated feminine power in later iconography. The image is fragmentary, broken off at the thighs and missing one arm completely; only a part of the other is preserved. An ink mark behind the piece perhaps reads 'S.D.', which might indicate that it was collected at Sar Dheri.

Several pieces[1] with this iconography have been found in the northwest, more particularly at Peshawar (Charsada). One item excavated at Charsada was dated by Wheeler to the first to second centuries AD.[2] There has been speculation as to whether this iconography refers to the character called Naigamesha, who appears as a goat – or cow-headed figure in Jain and Hindu literature. It is not unusual to find mythical figures with animal heads in early Indian art from the second century BC; in none of them, however, are the figures clearly identifiable as Naigamesha. The female animal-headed figures in stone from Mathura are *Matrikas*, associated with protecting and begetting children.

Naigamesha is an interesting deity. The most enduring depictions of him come from scenes around the myth of the birth of Mahavira; here he features as an agent who performs the in-vitro transfer of the embryo from the *brahmana* mother Devananda to the *kshatriya* Trishala. In sculpture and painting Naigamesha is shown as a goat-headed man. However, he is also listed in medical literature as one of the *grahas* (planets) to be propitiated for safe childbirth in Hindu texts. While the male Naigamesha is mentioned in these texts, in archaeological contexts we find several ram-, goat – or even bovine-headed terracotta figurines from the pre-Kushana to Gupta periods; these can be either male or female. The widespread occurrence of such figures shows how they were assimilated into the general social fabric irrespective of religious or cultic affiliations.

Recent research on their presence at the ancient Jetavana monastery near Shravasti by Gethin Rees and Fumitaka Yoneda has shown that the cult of these popular deities was integrated into worship at those Buddhist monasteries that offered medical care during pregnancy.[3] The precise documentation of the specific location of their excavation at the monastery is illuminating. There were substantially more figurines previously thought of as non-Buddhist found at the monastic dwelling than those regarded as being Buddhist. As many as 25 percent were of Naigamesha, clearly prompting us to rethink what we had p ously thought of as the extent of Buddh iconographic forms.

1 A closely comparable piece from Peshawar is the V&A Museum, no. IS 27–1951. For example in Indian collections, see P. L. Gupta, ed., *Patna Museum Catalogue of Antiquities*, Patna: Patna Museum, 1965, pl. XLV (Patna Museum Arch 4 or for another piece from Peshawar in the Luck Museum (no. 41.77), see S. C. Kala 1993, *op. cit.* p. 89, pl. 161. Also called 'Naigamesha', but with more pinched faces and more prominent ears, a a group of figurines from Bhita, near Allahabad see S. K. Mukhopadhyay, 'Terracottas from Bhi *Artibus Asiae*, XXXIV, 1972, pp. 71–94, pl. 6.

2 Wheeler 1962, *op. cit.*, pl. XXVI-A (fig. 4) and is a near parallel of our piece; however, it lacks t triangular impression.

3 G. Rees and F. Yoneda, 'Celibate monks and foetus-stealing gods: Buddhism and pregnancy the Jetavana Monastery, Shravasti, India', *World Archaeology*, vol. 45 (2), 2013, p. 256. For a more comprehensive analysis, see N. P. Ahuja, 'Some implications of a Buddhist interpretation of sm finds in the Early Historic Period', in *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology*, Turnhout: Brep (forthcoming 2018).

48 Two grotesque heads

*c.*First century BC–third century AD
Terracotta

48.1 HEAD WITH MONKEY FACE
Taxila, Northwest Frontier
H. 5 cm
EA1967.93
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

48.2 HEAD
Probably Taxila
H. 6.1, W. 4.7, diam. 4.5 cm
EA1967.89
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

The heavily worn fragment of the monkey-like face of a demonic character (cat. 48.1) is well fired to an orange colour. His wide, staring eyes are set below a deeply furrowed brow. A large grotesque nose, prominent tufts of hair on the cheeks and an open grimacing mouth that displays his teeth complete the ape-like character. Several monkey faces in a similar style have been found in the Northwest Frontier plains around Peshawar.[1] They have also been found across a wide set of dates – from late Mauryan through Kushan levels at sites in the Upper Gangetic Valley around Mathura.[2] In describing comparable pieces, Coomaraswamy observed that like similar figures from Mesopotamia, these monkey characters probably fulfilled a role of 'friendly and guardian demons' rather than of devils.[3]

1 A. H. Dani 1965–66, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–7, pl. 38, and Wheeler 1962, *op. cit.*, p. 111, pl. 28, figs. 1–2.
2 Coomaraswamy 1928(a), 1977 (reprint), *op. cit.*, pp. 64–76, p. 10, fig. 10 (in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, no. 27.370) and cats. 31–33, 35. See also V. S. Agrawala, *Mathura Terracottas* (original impression, Journal of the Uttar Pradesh Historical Society, 1936), reprinted Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1984, pl. 12, fig. 44. It is interesting that terracotta monkeys were popular contemporaneously in Central Asia as well.
3 Coomaraswamy 1928(a), 1977 (reprint), *op. cit.*, p. 14.

49 Monkey figurines

Terracotta
Approximately first century BC to first century AD

49.1 HEAD AND MOST OF BODY, LEGS MISSING
Site unrecorded
H. 8 cm
EA1958.29
Gift of E. M. Scratton

49.2 HEAD AND MOST OF BODY, LEGS MISSING
Site unrecorded
H. 7 cm
EA1958.44

49.3 HEAD AND MOST OF BODY, LEGS MISSING, BABY HELD IN THE CROOK OF LEFT ARM
Site unrecorded
H. 8.5 cm
EA1958.45

49.4 HEAD AND TORSO
Sar Dheri area, Northwest Frontier
H. 6 cm
EA1967.66
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

49.5 HEAD
Akra, Northwest Frontier
H. 4 cm
EA1967.78
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

49.6 HEAD AND TORSO OF AN UNIDENTIFIABLE FIGURE
Akra, Northwest Frontier
H. 7 cm
EA1967.79
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

49.7 HEAD AND TORSO
Taxila, Northwest Frontier
H. 9 cm
EA1967.91
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

49.8 HEAD
Site unrecorded
H. 3.5 cm
EA1967.96
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

49.9 HEAD AND TORSO
Either Akra or Bilot
H. 5.2 cm
EA1970.165
Gift of Mrs Almond

Small images of terracotta monkeys have been found at several sites in Northern India, the Northwest Frontier and even in Central Asia, and the ones unearthed at Sonkh and Ahichhatra[1] make for a useful comparison with which to date these. They are always shown as lively creatures, as is their wont, in a variety of attitudes. This collection is mostly from the environs of Shaikhan Dheri, where several excavated pieces from the Kushan period have been recorded.[2]

1 V. S. Agrawala, 'The Terracottas of Ahichhatra', originally in *Ancient India* 4, 1947–8, reprinted Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1985, pp. 125–6; H. Härtel *Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 years of a town in Mathura District*, Berlin: Reimer, 1993, pp. 169 (nos. 49–56) and 174.
2 A. H. Dani 1965–66, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 17–214, pl. XXXVIII.

49.1

49.2

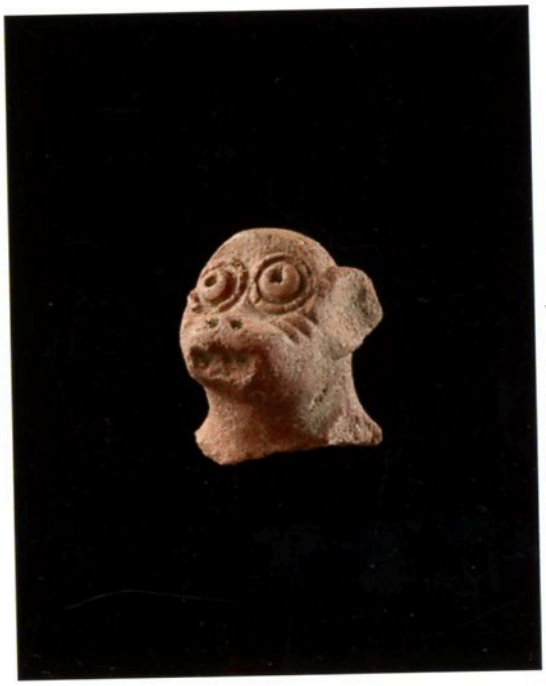
49.3

49.4

49.5

49.6

49.7



49.8

49.9

50 Five plaques of females with folded hands

50.1

50.2

50.3

Second–seventh centuries AD
Bannu area, Northwest Frontier
Terracotta

PUBLISHED: J.C. Harle, 'Artefacts from the Historical Period from Bannu', *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, Part 2, Rome, 1990, pp. 643–55

50.1
H. 10.7 cm
EA1967.76
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

50.2
H. 7.7 cm
EA1967.80
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

50.3
H. 7.9 cm
EA1967.81
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

50.4
Inscribed in ink on reverse 'Akra – presented by DC [District Commissioner] Bannu'
H. 7.8 cm
EA1969.77
Sir Marc Aurel Stein bequest

50.5
H. 8.4 cm
EA1970.169
Originally collected by Mrs Almond in 1934

This group shows yet another common type of figurine from the Bannu region of the Northwest Frontier. With small variations, they all portray a lady with her palms held together in *anjali* or *namaskara* mudra. The type includes minor variations: some examples are embellished with ornaments such as a *tika* or *bindu* on the forehead, or the clay may range in colour from grey to orange. The figures have all been pressed from moulds and show round faces with coarsely delineated, thickly set features.

The lower halves of these examples are mostly damaged, as is usually the case with such plaques. Even when they are complete, however, the plaques are only the upper halves of the figures, suggesting that the lower section may have broken away from a larger, heavier object. Possibly these pieces were originally fixed to the shoulders of ritual pots.[1] Not all such plaques are flat: some are curved back, and so may have been used as handles. The number of such figures found at Akra, the ancient mound near the town of Bannu, has lent the type the name of 'Akra Devi'.[2] The name is misleading, however, as similar handles have been found at other sites: in the Indo–Gangetic Divide at Ropar, Sugh and Naurangabad, in the Upper Gangetic Valley at Atranjikhera, Mathura, Kaushambi and Ahichhatra, ar in the Middle Gangetic Valley at Vaishali (Basarh). Pieces have also been recorded various sites in Rajasthan, such as Rairh, Nagar and Sambhar. Towards the northw the type has been recorded as far as north Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and other Cent Asian regions. Not only are the pieces generally similar in style, but they seem a to occupy a broad time span within the fi millennium AD.[3]

1 Seen in Alishing Valley in the Laghman region Afghanistan: J. C. Harle, 'Artefacts from the Hist Period at Bannu', *South Asian Archaeology 1987*, Part Rome, 1990, p. 650 (illustration of such a piece).

2 F. R. and B. Allchin, F. A. Durrani and M. Farid eds., *Lewan and the Bannu Basin, Excavation and survey of sites and environments in North West Pakista* B.A.R. International Series 310, Oxford, 1986, p. 183, illustrate five more terracottas similar to this in Peshawar. Also see F. Khan, R. Knox et al., *Explorations and Excavations in Bannu District, Nort Frontier Province, Pakistan 1985–1988*, British Muse Occasional Paper vol. 80, London: British Museu Press, 1991, figs. 5a–b, 6–7, and J. C. Harle, 'Towa Understanding Gupta Sculpture', in K. Khandala ed., *The Golden Age: Gupta Art – Empire, Province and Influence*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1991, figs. 7, 8 (top two rows). Cat. 50.2 (EA1967.80) was thermoluminescence-tested and estimated to hav been fired between 850 and 1400 years ago, see J. C. Harle 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 650, fig. 7.

51 Figurine with folded hands

50.4

First–fourth centuries AD
Akra, Bannu area
Terracotta
H. 8 cm
EA1967.100
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

This heavily worn figurine in the shape of a bottle stopper has boldly modelled features: a pinched nose, prominent ears and a vertical extension to the head. The folded hands of the figure are iconographically similar to the flat moulded plaques from the Bannu area discussed in the entry for Cat. 50.[1]

1 An almost identical piece is in the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, no. 939.18.8.

50.5

3 A wide range of comparable material from sites across the Indian subcontinent has been collected by R. C. Agrawala, *Human Figurines on Pottery Handles from India, and Allied problems*, V. L. Devkar, ed., Baroda: Department of Museums, 1970, particularly figs. 23–24, 29 (excavated from Basarh by Spooner and published in *ASI Annual Report*, 1913–14, Calcutta, 1917, p. 110, pl. XLIV-c, 30–3, 38–9, 48–53 and 59–60). For pieces from Ahichhatra, see V. S. Agrawala, 'The Terracottas of Ahichhatra', originally in *Ancient India* no. 4, 1947–8, pp. 104–79, reprinted Varanasi, 1985, p. 166; pieces from Kaushambi are catalogued by Kala 1980, *op. cit.*, nos. 379–82 (Allahabad Museum nos. 5266, 5194, 1526 and 5342).

52 Two moulded vessels

First–third centuries AD
Gandhara
Terracotta
Purchased for the former Indian Institute Museum from Charles Fabri in 1941

52.1 MOULDED VESSEL
H. 5.7, diam. 9.5 cm
EAX.154a

52.2 MOULDED VESSEL
H. 5.7, diam. 9.5 cm
EAX.154b

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, 'Two moulded Terracotta Vessels', in J. Guy, ed., *Indian Art and Connoisseurship: Essays in Honour of Douglas Barrett*, New Delhi and Ahmedabad: Indira Gandhi National Centre and Mapin Publishing, 1995, pp. 44–51, figs. 234–5; J. C. Harle 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 14, nos. 8 and 9.

Made from a well levigated yellow clay covered in a red wash or slip, both these vessels are of similar size and shape although neither is intact (each lacks a different portion). They are formed by luting a nearly hemispherical moulded (and decorated) upper portion to a shallow, saucer-shaped base. A short spout with a broad everted rim is attached near the base of the container.

Cat. 52.1 shows three figures in a central medallion, encased in a waving scroll surrounded by three borders. The innermost is a pearl border, the middle border is composed of pairs of droplets or leaves and the outer consists of a schematised vine scroll, interspersed with scenes of weapon-wielding hunters chasing, at least in one case, a lion. The central medallion of 52.2 shows an archer in the dynamic pose of *alidha* or *pratyalidha*, facing a standing eagle with outspread wings; he is surrounded, as in the other piece, by three prominent borders. The inner two are very worn and the patterns are indistinguishable, while the outermost is designed in a typical Hellenistic key pattern.

The vessels can be compared in shape with condensers or distilling flasks found at Rangmahal, Taxila (Sirkap),[1] Shaikhan Dheri,[2] Jaulian and Begram.[3] However, the Ashmolean's examples are much smaller and more elaborately decorated; they are obviously intended for the preparation of luxurious condiments, oils or spirits. While noting the similarity of these vessels to Tibetan pilgrim bottles, Harle says that the latter were made much later. They were also made of metal and designed to be suspended over saddles, a function for which fragile terracotta vessels would be most unsuitable.

Dating these vessels is difficult. Harle has dated them to the fifth century AD.[4] While this is possible, a case may also be made for dating them anywhere between the first to fourth centuries AD. The comparable flasks from Shaikhan Dheri are dated to the Scytho–Parthian period, about the mid-first century BC to mid-first century AD.[5] The motif of the three figures may be related to a classically Indian composition known from the first century BC, in which a man is shown standing between two women.[6] Although the pearl border is known from the first century AD (Satvahana period and in Mathura), it is characteristic of Iranian art of the Sassanian period. The vine scroll with the lion hunt is known to us from at least as early as the Indo–Scythian period. The motif of the eagle with outspread wings is popular in Gandhara, where it is used in architecture as well as sculpture. Iconographically, it usually refers to one of several myths involving an encounter of a *garuda*, the semi-divine solar kite, with *nagas* and *naginis*, serpent deities who are often shown anthropomorphically. Even in ancient times however, these images were consciously polyvalent, conveying different meanings to different viewers. The popularity of the Hellenistic and Roman depiction of Zeus as the eagle abducting Ganymede might equally have been the source of this image. Further, the popularity of these motifs continued for a long duration, from at least as early as the late first century AD,[7] like the other motifs listed above, into the sixth century when variations of it can be seen on Sassanian textiles, by which time, the image had no doubt acquired a new nomenclature and narrative.

1 Marshall 1951, *op. cit.*, vol. 2: nos. 43, 45, 129 and 140; pl. 125, nos. 127–8; also in F. Tissot, *The Art of Gandhara*, Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1986, fig. 255.
2 F. R. Allchin, 'Evidence for Early Distillation at Shaikan Dheri', in M. Taddei, ed., *South Asian Archaeology* 1977, Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1979, figs. 7a–b.
3 Parallels from Jaulian at Taxila, Begram in Afghanistan and Rangmahal in Rajasthan have been noted by J. C. Harle, 'Two moulded Terracotta Vessels', in J. Guy, ed., *Indian Art and Connoisseurship: Essays in Honour of Douglas Barrett*, New Delhi and Ahmedabad, 1995, pp. 44–51, figs. 234–5.
4 Harle 1995, *op. cit.*
5 A. H. Dani 1965–66, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 17–214, fig. 40 (15–17), fig. 41, pp. 166, 167, 201.
6 One of the first examples is from Sanchi Stupa 2, on the upper part of a pillar that also shows an early image of Surya.
7 Although the motif is known as early as the British Museum's Bimaran reliquary, we cannot assume that its symbolic meaning is the same in all contexts; see G. Fussman and M. le Berre, Monuments bouddhiques de la région de Caboul I: Le monastère de Gul Dara, Paris: Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan XXII, Paris: Diffusion De Boccard 1976, pp. 9–10, pls. XXXVIII–XL; G. Fussman, 'Ruines de la vallée de Wardak', *Arts Asiatiques*, 30, 1974, pp. 76–7; A. Lezine, 'Trois Stupa de la Région de Caboul', *Artibus Asiae*, 27, 1964, pp. 19–20.

53 Head of Surya

Probably third century AD
From an unrecorded site in the Northwest Frontier
Terracotta
H. 4.4 cm
EA1958.17
Gift of E. M. Scratton

This small crowned head flanked by two lotus flowers probably depicts Surya, the solar deity. Crowned deities bearing a lotus in each hand usually depict Surya, although more complete examples would have shown him riding a horse-drawn chariot. The figure's crown, with its three peaks, is a type widely known from the late Kushan period in terracottas from Afghanistan. The figure's face is moulded, and his rounded face and almond-shaped eyes also recall Kushan terracotta figures.

54 Elephant and rider

Second–third centuries AD
Northwest Frontier region
Bronze
H. 7 cm
EA1993.390

This solid-cast, leaded bronze shows a large mahout with prominent discoid earrings riding a disproportionately small elephant raising his trunk, perhaps denoting the attitude of salutation commonly required of elephants. The motif of the mahout on his elephant, sometimes accompanied by fellow riders, is widespread. It often occurs as part of complex ancient Indian narratives where, in the presence of other contextual information, it is sometimes possible to determine exactly what the story is, who the protagonists are and even, of course, the identity of the elephant.

While we will never know that in the case of this charming little bronze figurine, it is worth considering that it may have been part of any number of contexts. It may have served as a figure in a tableau of religious imagery, in a royal or festive procession, or in some other narrative, such as the escape of king Udayana in legend and Bhasa's drama, the Hindu and Buddhist Airavata who is the god Indra's mount, or Gajatama or Chhadanta – elephants famous in the Jataka stories, to name only a few that find repeated reference in visual narratives in pre-Gupta times. Or it may simply have been a secular object, a plaything or a chessman.

55 Kushan male figure

First–early fourth centuries AD
Afghanistan
Bronze
H. 5.5 cm
EA 1995.13

This flat-backed plaque of a full-length, standing, stocky and bearded figure was reportedly found in northern Afghanistan. The carved figure wears a turban and a dhoti, and holds an indistinct object, perhaps a sword in a broad scabbard. His thickly set, broad features, large nose and beard can indicate a Parthian or Kushan date, but the dhoti (as distinct from baggy trousers) is less common in those cultures.

The plaque's workmanship, however, is comparable to that of some metal images from various sites between Jhelam and North Afghanistan. These are mostly derived from a style of 'royal portraits' and are dated to the second-century Kushan period. At the same time, the style is known in the Parthian realm in Margiana – which, of course, traded numerous small items with Bactria, where this object would probably have been made. The few coins dateable to the Kidarites from Bactria also show similar figures, and the style continued into the earliest Sassanian images.[1] These latter styles demonstrate the endurance of this regional style.

1 See a bronze male figure in the Louvre (no. A.O. 22134) from Iran dated to the third century AD with similar features, in L. van den Berghe et al., *Hofkunst van de Sassanieden: het Perzische rijk tussen Rome en China (224–642)*, Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, exhib. cat., Brussels, 1993, no. 25, p. 168. This piece was previously compared with one at the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (no. I3643), in Prudence Oliver Harper, *The Royal Hunter: Art of the Sasanian Empire*, exhib. cat., New York: Asia Society, 1978, pp. 88–9.

56 Female figurine

First–third centuries AD
Northwest Frontier region
Silver–lead alloy
H. 5.2 cm
EA1993.25

This small metal figure is gracefully conceived, showing a nude female with downcast eyes delicately covering her pelvis with a drapery. The figure is cast in the round, the back is completely nude and the statuette is broken off at the knees.

A high percentage of lead is common in the bronzes of this period. The well-finished, sensuous modelling of the body, her pose and the manner of holding her drape compare with another lead alloy figure that has been tentatively dated to the first century AD and reported as coming from Afghanistan.[1] Her altogether 'Indian' appearance, the careful placement of a long necklace that falls between her breasts, the prominent *tika* (*urna*?) or dot on the forehead and wide eyes suggest that she may be from the Kushan period. The figure's hair is tied in a high chignon, held up by a string of beads; she is also adorned with a short necklace, armbands and bracelets. She holds up an indistinct object in her right hand.

1 Errington and Cribb 1992, *op. cit.*, no. 114 and cover illus. (back of statuette not shown).

57 Skanda

c. First century AD
Northwest Frontier
Bronze
H. 10.3 cm
EA1994.59

The mythical figure of Skanda is also commonly known as Karttikeya, Murugan, Kumara and Mahasena. By the Gupta period he was known (and sculpturally seen) as the son of Shiva, but this had not always been the case. In the numerous pre-Kushan and early Kushan sculptures of Mathura that depict panels of the Matrikas, or divine mothers, we find them associated with the figure of Skanda, holding a lance. In the Gupta period, by contrast, associations with Shiva had become *de rigueur.*

The *Aranyakaparvan* section of the *Mahabharata* has several references to Skanda, which are widely regarded as the oldest textual references to him. They reveal the terrifying strength in the child Skanda's body. This corresponds to descriptions of the character in early Ayurvedic literature (such as the *Kashyapa-samhita* and *Shushruta-samhita*), where he is known to inflict disease and holds a position of power over the Matrikas, who adopted him as their son. Skanda is then known as one of nine *grahas* ('seizers' or 'graspers'). This image comes from such an early phase.[1]

In the post-Kushan period, not only do Shiva and Vishnu gradually subsume many other deities, but the iconography of the *nava-grahas* ('nine seizers') also changes, becoming associated with astrological planets. The post-Mauryan to Kushan period was one that saw the most dramatic shifts in the sacred iconography of India. Several emergent deities and many older ones declined with the rise to ascendancy of Brahmanical gods, including Shiva and Vishnu, in a process which continued through the Gupta period. Thus by the time of the *Kumarasambhava* by Kalidasa (fifth century AD), Skanda has become known as the dutiful son of Shiva and general of the army of the gods.

The early bronze Skanda that we see here reinforces his power as a *graha* ('grasper') by holding a noose in his right hand; the spear, his more typical cognisance, is held in his left. His strength is underscored by his powerful inflated chest. Stylistically the figure belongs to the Kushan period. The crown with the central medallion, the large head and his broad facial features are all associated with the Kushans, both in Mathura and Gandhara. While it is perfectly possible that small portable images such as this and the Kushan female bronze (cat. 58) were made in North India, from where they travelled to the northwest, the not inconsiderable number of such images found in Afghanistan does permit speculation about whether they were in fact made there. The more Mathura-like style of this piece is further substantiated by the nature of the musculature, which is unlike the heightened naturalism so characteristic of Gandhara. Meanwhile his attire, a dhoti, is unlike the stone images of Skanda from Gandhara; these show him in armour, and usually with a cockerel and spear, but no with a noose.[2] Another bronze Skanda, slightly smaller than this figure, was fou in the excavations at Sonkh in Mathura District and is securely dated to the first century AD.[3]

1 For a succinct exposition of the development of the Skanda cult in literature and art, see R. Mann, 'Parthian and Hellenistic Influences on the Development of Skanda's Cult in North India: Evidence from Kusana-Era Art and Coin *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 15, 2001, pp. 111–28; D. M. Srinivasan, 'Skanda / Karttikeya in the Ea Art of the Northwest', *Silk Road Art and Archaeol* 1997–8, pp. 233–68.

2 I. Kurita, *Gandharan Art* 11, Tokyo: Nigensha Publishing Company, 2003, p. 164, nos. 476–8 and no. 519, p. 180. Also see the Ashmolean's sto Skanda, Cat. 66 below (Barrett bequest).

3 The Sonkh examples are flat-cast frontal ima one is separated from a group, while the other h consort: see H. Härtel, 'The Pre-Kusana and Ea Kusana Levels at Sonkh', in D. M. Srinivasan, e *the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kusana World*, Le Boston: E. J. Brill, 2007, p. 334, figs. 12.29, 12.3

58 Female figure

c. First century AD
North India
Bronze
H. 10.6 cm
EA2000.41

Although this figure of a young woman is standing, she is far from static. Her right leg, prominently bent at the knee, seems to be on the verge of taking a step, her weight coming to rest on the left side. She is lifting her hands nearly to shoulder height, as if she were raising or carrying something. Her face is large and round, topped by a medallion and framed by large, double-hoop earrings. She also wears other pieces of jewellery of a type widely recorded in Mathura sculpture: these include multiple bracelets that cover three-quarters of her forearms, thick, heavy anklets and a twisted cord that lies over her shoulders and falls over her exposed breasts. A dhoti, held up by a belt worn high at the waist gathers and pleats between and beside her legs. The figure stands on a small stand.

This is a fine example of early Indian metal casting in the *cire perdue* or lost wax process, in which a wax model sculpture is covered in clay to make a terracotta mould. The wax is then replaced with molten bronze, and when the metal has cooled, the mould is broken open to reveal the final image. This casting of a female figure is stylistically akin to the stone *yakshis* of the Mathura area from the Kushan period, although this sculpture is said to have been discovered in the Gandhara region. It is quite likely that such a small portable image would have travelled to the northwest where a group of such early Kushan bronzes have been found.[1]

The style of the figure may also be compared with contemporaneous bronzes from other parts of India: the *yakshis* on the base of the bronze *dharmachakra* of the early first century AD found at Chausa in Bihar,[2] and a few others from Brahmapuri in the Deccan,[3] as well as from unrecorded find spots. However, it remains very difficult to ascribe specific regional stylistic traits within the corpus of early (Kushan) bronzes from the Deccan, North or Central India. There is a similarity in all these pieces and, because they are found with objects made in other parts of the subcontinent, it is clear that they were much valued and travelled long distances.

1 See for instance, a *yakshi* found in Kara Bulak, Central Asia, in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, and another second-century AD *yakshi* in the British Museum (no. 1963.2.151): both have similar features to the Ashmolean one, with thick anklets, a heavy belt, full breasts and rounded faces. Both are illustrated in Ulrich von Schroeder, *Indo-Tibetan bronzes*, Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications, 1981, pl. 42B; also an unpublished, closely comparable bronze statuette is at the V&A Museum (no. IS.8–1989).

2 The Jain double-sided *dharmachakra* is supported by a long haft flanked by *makaras*, out of the mouths of which emerge two *yakshis* in *tribhanga* posture: Patna Museum (no. 6540), variously illustrated, including P. K. Agrawala, *Early Indian Bronzes*, Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1977, figs. 122–5.

3 K. Khandalavala, 'Brahmapuri', *Lalit Kala* 7, April 1960, pp. 29–75.

59 A Bodhisattva

Third–fourth centuries AD
From an unrecorded site in the Northwest Frontier or Central Asia
Terracotta
H. 15 cm
EA1994.85
Gift of Simon Digby

The dramatically persuasive influence of Buddhism in Central Asia, initiated in the pre-Kushan period, only continued to grow until the tenth century. Images were made in a wide variety of media to suit different patrons, with small terracottas being usually intended for private home shrines.

This nimbate Bodhisattva is typically jewelled and attired in thick drapery, in keeping with the general Gandhara style; his upturned eyes and a curving moustache tend to give him a more northern feel. Three-peaked crowns are already recorded in second-century Kushan terracottas in Gandhara, and with its growing height this figure now clearly anticipates those found in medieval northwestern and Kashmiri images.

60 Head

Fourth–fifth centuries AD
Gandhara
Terracotta
H. 5 cm
EA1999.41
Gift of an anonymous donor

This moulded face is perfectly oval, set with large wide eyes under arched eyebrows, a small bow-shaped mouth, wide forehead and high cheekbones. A damaged crown can be seen on the head. The small, delicately modelled head shows a developed form of the Gandhara style as it mixes with the early Gupta styles of Central India. Although this example is on a much more modest scale than the portrait heads in stucco and terracotta produced in Gandhara in the same period, the style of this fragment may be better appreciated as a synthesis of that tradition with the legacy of moulded Kushan and pre-Kushan plaques.

61 Four tiles

*c.*Fourth century AD
Harwan, Kashmir
Terracotta

61.1 FRAGMENT OF TILE WITH DUCKS
H. 15, W. 9.8 cm
EAX.2043
Gift of Prof. A.W. Sayce
(Sent by Major W. Howe-Greene to Prof. Sayce and Mrs Traquair, 27 March 1925)

61.2 FRAGMENT OF TILE WITH FLORAL MOTIFS
From the row of petals radiating from the central lotus in the courtyard at Harwan
H. 18, W. 10.8 cm
EAX.2042
Gift of Prof. A. W. Sayce
(Sent by Major W. Howe-Greene to Prof. Sayce and Mrs Traquair, 27 March 1925)

61.3 FRAGMENTARY TILE WITH MOUNTED BOWMAN
H. 15.75, W. 13.5 cm
EAX.2044
Gift of Prof. A. W. Sayce
(Sent by Major W. Howe-Greene to Prof. Sayce and Mrs Traquair, 27 March 1925)

61.4 TILE WITH ASCETICS
H. 52.7, W. 33 cm
EA1980.65

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture: Indian sculpture of the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries A.D.*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 57, pl. 144; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 27

61.1

The large Buddhist monastery of Harwan was paved with decorative terracotta tiles, stamped with a wide variety of motifs. These exemplified several stylistic influences that can be traced to Sassanian, Central and Eastern Indian, late Roman and Central Asian elements. The building itself was apsidal, with a circular sanctum preceded by an oblong hall. Remains of a stupa and other small structures, the earliest of which are built with Kushan 'diaper' walls, stand on a lower terrace.[1] Later structures of a pebble and mud version are ascribed a mid-fifth century Huna date.

The floor of the courtyard at Harwan was faced with stamped terracotta tiles arranged to suggest the form of an enormous open lotus, perhaps symbolic of the transcendent open lotus, which was bordered by and incorporated a host of other motifs. The best-known terracotta tiles are stamped with a long-haired, emaciated, apparently ascetic figure squatting in a foetal position. These tiles formed the risers of a bench at one end of the courtyard where presumably monks sat. Each of them bears two stamped impressions of ascetics between which, interestingly, Kharoshthi numerals are scratched. These probably indicate where the tile was meant to be placed within the courtyard.

The lower register on these large tiles is occupied by a row of lively ducks, often holding banners and water lilies in their beaks. The upper fifth of the plaques show repeated impressions of the heads and shoulders of conversing couples

Fig. 40. View of the courtyard, Harwan monastery, before destruction (ASI)

61.4

61.2

above a railing. In contrast to the stylised squatting ascetics with their distinctive appearance, these figures are usually thought of as following in the tradition of contemporary portrait sculpture from Gandhara.[2] However, their heavy facial features with strong lower jaws, beards, ringlets of hair falling before the ears and the repeating tulip/lily in the lower register are reminiscent of the contemporary, so-called Hephthalite styles.[3] The large round earrings, on the other hand, are not dissimilar to those on figures represented on Gupta coins. The motif of conversing figures in overhanging balconies is of longstanding history in India.[4] Similarly the love of rows of ducks, or *hamsas*, as a decorative device can also be traced back to the third-century BC Mauryan period in India, although the source of the influence here is undoubtedly the geographically and temporally close Gandhara imagery. Tiles that show spirited mounted bowmen hunting game are usually compared with Sassanian examples from Iran. Examples in other collections depict antelopes in the Scythian style, and still others are impressed with waterborne plants.

Other plaques from the site (mostly in Indian collections) show motifs such as *putti* supporting a wavy garland that conceptually resemble imagery from Gandhara, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda – and are widely regarded as deriving from the Roman world – of the second to fourth centuries AD. Similarly a variant of the key fret pattern can be traced to Hellenistic sources. However, the widely represented *purnaghatas*, or globular vases overflowing with blossoming flowers (a symbol of plenitude), and lotuses at the site are no doubt Indian.

In addition to these disparate stylistic influences, there is further ambiguity about the significance of the emaciated figures at this site; Buddhist practice did not encourage excessive fasting and monks were expected to keep their heads shaved. It has been suggested that the 'ascetics' might represent spirits of the dead or ghosts ('*pretas*'),[5] or that they may perhaps belong to the ancient Ajivika sect, members of which might have been active in this area prior to their conversion to Buddhism.[6] At the same time it is worth noting the presence of emaciated naked mendicants modelled in terracotta at the early Pala period (eighth century) Buddhist stupa at Paharpur, Rajshahi District in Bangladesh[7] – although the plaques at Harwan are certainly earlier than that.

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1 R. C. Kak, *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*, London: India Society, 1933, pp. 105–11, pls. XXVII–XLII; Debala Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments*, Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1971, p. 111, pl. 85. R. E. Fisher, 'The Enigma of Harwan', *Art International* 25, December 1982, pp. 33–45.

2 Poster 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

3 The closest comparisons come from Hephthalite or Huna coins of the late fifth century, large numbers

61.3

of which are represented in several collections around the world; see R. Göbl, *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Iranischen Hunnen in Baktrien und Indien*, vols. 1–4, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1967. For instance the copper coins and silver dinars featuring the portrait of Toramana or other Hephthalite royals such as Khingila (approximately 440–90), some of whose coins were found in a relic deposit at Hadda (British Museum: CM 1896.5–6.1164, published Göbl 1967, *op cit.*, pp. 71–2; see also 122, 9, a stylistically close copper coin of Toramana from the Punjab, in the collection of the Ashmolean (H. de S. Shortt bequest 1975). See also Göbl 1967, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pl. 27, no. 88, which shows an earthen pot with three lilies/tulips, again a motif popular at Harwan, pl. 16, no. 8 and pl. 93, no. 3. For a study of the development of the tulip motif in early Central Asian art, see K. Tanabe, 'Heracles and his Diadem with Tulips: East–West Cultural Contact in Greco-Bactrian Kingdom', *Bulletin of the Ancient Orient Museum*, XX, pp. 51–100; Tanabe suggests that by and from the sixth century (that is, in the Hephthalite period) tulips with five petals became more popular compared to the older three-petalled flowers – a trend which is in keeping with our dating of Harwan. Stylistically comparable motifs in Hephthalite glyptic arts can be seen in P. Callieri, *Seals and Sealings from the North-West of the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan (4th century* BC–*11th century* AD), Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1998, pl. 24 (cat. 7.40), pl. 64 (cat. U 7.37, U7.41).

4 The motif can be traced all the way back to Bharhut and Sanchi, through Kushan Mathura. However, immediate inspiration at Harwan might have come from the local Gandhara region, where this idea had also been absorbed.

5 J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield 1987, no. 27, p. 21.

6 Fisher 1982, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–45; Fisher's opinion finds favour with Pal 1986, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 223–4.

7 One such is illustrated in Poster 1986, *op. cit.*, no. 114.

62 Vishnu within lion

c. Fifth century AD
Northwest India, reportedly found near Charsada
Terracotta
H. 11.5 cm
EA1998.34

This three-dimensional sculpture in red terracotta is of a transversely halved, seated lion. It is a most remarkable interpretation of Vishnu as Narasimha. On the obverse, or literally on the exterior, we see quite simply a strong lion in profile. The image is damaged, with both the head and forepaws missing. On the reverse, or within the lion, is Vishnu; he is shown standing in his usual pose as the strong king and upholder of righteous order, armed with one of his distinguishing attributes, the mace. His other three arms usually hold the chakra, lotus and conch, although the latter two are not consistently represented until the sixth century. None of these attributes are easily distinguishable in this image. Were the image of Vishnu here complete, his face would be surmounted by a square or cylindrical crown.

'Avatar' derives from the Sanskrit word *avatarana*, which means 'to descend', and in Vaishnava theology the concept became a popular way of depicting Vishnu in his many incarnations – as animals, humans or sometimes half-animal and half-human. By the Gupta period images of Narasimha, in which the god appears as a man-lion, had risen to prominence. Vishnu is seen here, physically present, incarnated within the lion. The myth of this avatar records the terrifying and all-powerful manifestation of the god as Mahavishnu, the great Narayana – the eternal saviour of his followers, establishing order and vanquishing evil.

Narayana's foe in this episode was Hiranyakashipu, a *daitya* king who, as is recorded in some *Puranas*, had tried to win immortality through his devotion and penance. As that gift could not be given to mortals, Hiranyakashipu extracted a boon that made him as nearly immortal as a mortal could be. He would not succumb to death at the hands of either man or beast, nor would he succumb to death during the day or at night, nor indoors or out-of-doors – thus cannily covering all eventualities of time, space and bodily incorporation of spirit that death might choose. Once he knew he was invincible, Hiranyakashipu became egocentric and tyrannical – and so, naturally enough, a sworn opponent of Vishnu. But Vishnu eventually emerged in this fantastic incarnation (being neither wholly man nor entirely a beast), at twilight (which is neither day nor night), and disembowelled the evil king at the threshold of his palace (which is neither indoors or outside), thus still upholding, technically, the boon that Hiranyakashipu had been given. Vishnu's liminal nature in this myth makes him the personification of overcoming all limiting binaries of time, space and corporeality.

Only one half of this lion is preserved, but we may safely assume that the other half would also have included an image. This might have been of the goddess Lakshmi (variously known also in her forms of Shri, Bhu, etc), which would make this a remarkable early image of the god with his consort. It is also noteworthy that Vishnu is contained within the proper right side of the whole lion, leaving the left side, as in the tradition of syncretic icons, for the feminine half.

opposite: 62 obverse and reverse, illustrated at actual size

63 Two male heads

Fourth–fifth centuries AD
Akhnur, Jammu area
Terracotta
Purchased from Charles Fabri in 1941 for the former Indian Institute Museum

63.1
H. 9 cm
EAOS.50

63.2
H. 12.7 cm
EAOS.50a

PUBLISHED: C. L. Fabri, 'Akhnur Terracottas', *Marg*, VIII, 2, 1955, fig. 9B; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 28

A tradition of impressionistic sculpture in clay and stucco grew popular in the Gandhara area between the late Kushan and Gupta periods. These expressive heads in red terracotta from the Jammu region, south of the Kashmir Valley, have the same sensibility as contemporary stucco portrait statuary from centres such as Hadda in Afghanistan, although the regional style is different. Most heads from Akhnur tend to share the same features: plump faces with elaborate hairstyles, full lips, large eyes and soft, rounded contours, bearing witness to the influence of Gupta India. However, the naturalistic individual differences, moustaches, ornament and, when visible, costume are often derived from Central Asian and Hellenistic ideals that were more popular further west in Afghanistan and the Northwest Frontier. Akhnur and its related sites have produced mostly detached heads that were buried in the rubble at the base of the stupas; they were probably decapitated from full figures, perhaps at the time of an invasion.

While there is no definite way to identify these heads, we do know that they come from a Buddhist context. When Fabri first studied these objects[1] he dated them to the eighth century, but subsequent investigations have dated the site to the sixth century.[2] However, there are strong conceptual parallels with similar portrait and caricature heads from Gandhara. Such affinities, considered together with the recent investigations of the Archaeological Survey of India under B. R. Mani at Akhnu nearby Ushkur (ancient Huvishkapura, which has also produced very similar pieces and the neighbouring site of Ganeshpur, mean that these heads can now be assigned an even earlier dating, to the third to fourth centuries AD.[3]

1 C. L. Fabri, 'Akhnur Terracottas', *Marg* VIII, 1955, no. 2.

2 M. Chandra, 'Terracotta heads from Akhnur', *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India*, nos. 1–2, 1973, pp. 54–7.

3 B. R. Mani, in *Newsletter of the Circle of Inner Asian Art*, London: SOAS, 2001.

63.1

63.2

64 A mould with lotus decoration

First century BC–fourth century AD
Gandhara
Terracotta
H. 3.6, diam. 4.7 cm
EA1967.65
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

It is impossible to date this mould specifically, as the motif of the lotus-like floral roundel was used for centuries in Indian art. It was also a surface find, thus has no stratigraphic context, which further prevents one from proffering a definite date. Terracotta moulds were used for a variety of purposes. They made terracotta plaques or applique decorations of clay, were frequently used in kitchens to decorate dough and sweetmeats and also executed patterns of decoration in stucco and on the floor, to name only a few possible functions. Floral impressions of lotuses such as these, often found as the central medallion on top of the headdress of clay figurines, were a common part of the decorative vocabulary. One may speculate that this could have been made for use in a potter's workshop (a spectacular mould from Eastern India is in the Museum's collection, see Cat. 135).

The entire object is conical in shape, making it look rather like a small votive stupa or gaming piece. However, considering that it comes from the collection of Col. Martin, who made a large bequest of his collection of early historic terracottas from Gandhara, as well as its specific shape and wear, it is most likely to be a terracotta mould.

65 Box lid with *kinnaras*

Fifth–sixth centuries AD
Northwest Frontier
Steatite
H. 8.3, W. 10.6, D. 1.1 cm
EA2013.38
Bequest of Douglas and Mary Barrett

This oval lid is carved with a *kinnara* loving couple, among luxuriant scrolls. *Kinnaras* (and female *kinnaris*) are semi-divine celestial beings of the extended family of devas (*Agni Purana*, Chapter 51). The word in Sanskrit is literally a compound of *kim* + *nara*, meaning 'what [kind of] man?'; befitting that meaning they are often pictured as semi-metamorphosed creatures, half-human and half-bird or animal. Intimately connected with music and the arts, they may also be shown holding and playing musical instruments. In fact, *kinnaras* (along with *gandharvas*) are thought of as the musicians and dancers of the gods; given their changeable forms and nature, they are also associated with indeterminate or shifting gender and with amorousness. They are found in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religions, and so one cannot determine whether the box that this *kinnara* and *kinnari* once adorned came from a specific ritual context. Equally, such semi-divine motifs would be well suited to a container of unguents or cosmetics, or to a similar secular function.

The particular style of the scrolling foliage that issues from the tails of the *kinnara* and *kinnari* (with its calligraphic quality of showing curving and bending leaves and stalks) is rendered in a characteristically Gupta idiom. The carving is comparable with the exquisite vegetal creepers on the doorways of the Gupta and Late Gupta temples of Central India, such as Nachna-Kuthara, Deogarh, Marhia and others. It is well known that the Gupta style of this region, along with its expressions at other centres in Northern India, spread widely across Asia and, as this example shows, to the Northwest Frontier as well. In fact the specific nature of the mingling of Gandhara and Gupta styles that occurred in the late fifth and sixth centuries in Kashmir, the Northwest and Swat remains a nebulous subject. It is, however, one of tremendous importance in appreciating the subsequent regional styles that emerged there.

A set of five closely comparable lids of stone boxes, also oval in shape, with some also bearing mythical creatures (a winged lion, a *makara* emerging from a bud, and a phoenix) amidst Gupta style vegetal foliage, are in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. There they are attributed to Gandhara and dated to the fifth century AD. The Ashmolean's piece almost certainly belongs to the same set.[1] A sixth comparable lid is in the Cleveland Museum of Art.[2]

1 Previously Prof. Samuel Eilenberg collection: Lerner and Kossak 1991, *op. cit.*, nos. 57–61, pp. 91–2 and col. pl.

2 Cleveland Museum of Art (no. 72.164), carved with a scene of combat in which a man is shown spearing a lion.

66 Skanda or Kumara

c.AD 450–600
Swat
Steatite
H. 18, W. 9.6, D. 3.7 cm
EA2013.64
Bequest of Douglas and Mary Barrett

Once part of the Greater Kashmir state, Swat has historically shared close ties with both the regions of Kashmir and Gandhara. Traces can be seen in this sculpture of stylistic elements of both regions.[1] Rich monastic settlements flourished in Swat in the early centuries of the Christian era, although their role in the general life of society in the sixth century (the period of this sculpture) is not clear. This was a time of many political upheavals and incursions by the Kidarites, the Huns (Hephthalites, Alchons) and Central Asian nomads. It was also a period in which an increasing amount of Hindu imagery begins to be recorded from the region.

Skanda, also known as Kumara or Karttikeya, is the youthful god of war. He has a long and significant history in the Northwest Frontier region (see Cat. 57).[2] Whereas his early iconography associated him more with the cult of the Matrikas or divine mothers, by the date of this sculpture he was perceived more readily as a son of Shiva. Skanda can be seen in this example with his hair typically arranged into three pony-tails. He holds a spear or lance in his right hand and a small cockerel in his left, and stands beside the peacock which is his mount.

1 Compare a schist or potstone image of Kumara or Skanda from the northwest in the V&A Museum (IM.4–1937, accessed online 28 July 2011: http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O24856/sculpture).
2 D. M. Srinivasan 1997, *op. cit.*, pp. 233–68.

67 Surya

c.AD 600
Afghanistan
Bronze with gold and silver
H. 20, W. 11.2, D. 5 cm max.
EA1986.2
Gift of Douglas and Mary Barrett

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 34; J. Siudmak, 'A carved Rock Relief at Nadihel in the Kashmir Valley', *South Asian Archaeology 1991*, Stuttgart, 1993, p. 642

The sun-god Surya is shown standing; he holds a small stylised lotus in each hand and is flanked by his attendants Pingala and Danda. This Surya bears several features that can be generally associated with workmanship of the immediately pre-Shahi period. He wears a short crown, for example, incised with a repeating demi-lunar pattern over his hair (dressed in the Iranian manner, like a bob, covering the tops of his ears and curling inward at the nape of his neck). Also notable are the short cape over his shoulders, the stylised fluttering ends of the scarf draped between his arms and the Kushan-style boots that reach below his long, tunic-like garment.[1] A long sword hangs by his left side. Pingala, standing on his right, holds a stylus and ink-pot, while Danda, on his left, bears a staff.

The eyes of all the figures are inlaid in silver and a small gold inlaid *urna* marks Surya's forehead.[2] Originally thought to belong generally to the Kashmiri idiom of bronzes, the sculpture has subsequently been associated more specifically with the Kabul Valley.[3] There are several references that testify to the importance of Surya in the region. An extraordinary image of Surya in marble, dating from the fifth to sixth centuries and now in the Kabul Museum, was found in the excavations at the largely Hindu shrine at Khair Khana in the Kabul Valley. It reveals Kushano-Sassanian influences and conventions which were obviously developed during the later Turki- and Hindu-Shahi period. The sites of Bamiyan and Kakrak also bear references to the worship of Surya, Surya-Mithras and his retinue, including the Adityas and his son Revanta.[4]

1 On the garment, see K. Tanabe, 'Sasanian "Apron-shirt" and the Date of the Two Marble Statues of Surya from Khair Khaneh', in *La Persia e l'Asia Centrale*, Rome, 1996, pp. 489–514.

2 Metal analysis of the bronze is given in J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, no. 34, p. 26: Iron: trace; Copper: 91.0; Lead 1.2; Tin: 7.6; Antimony: 0.18.

3 J. Siudmak, 'A carved Rock Relief at Nadihel in the Kashmir Valley', *South Asian Archaeology 1991*, Stuttgart, 1993, p. 642.

4 Z. Tarzi, *L'Architecture et le Décor Rupestre des Grottes de Bāmiyān*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1977, pls. D 57 155, D 58 156, D 59 157 and A 5.

68 Narasimha slaying the demon Hiranyakashipu

Late sixth century–early seventh century AD
Kashmir
Stone
H. 10.5, W. 6.5, D. 1.5 cm
EA 1996.78
Gift of Alexander Götz in honour of Professor Samuel Eilenberg

PUBLISHED: P. Pal, *The Arts of Kashmir*, New York: Asia Society, 2007, p. 73, fig. 64

The iconography of Narasimha, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu, was certainly already established in the Kushan period. However, the elaborations of his mythic narrative that show him attacking Hiranyakashipu only come to popularity in the Gupta and post-Gupta periods in the central, northern and northwestern parts of the subcontinent. The Gandhara stylistic origins of the Hiranyakashipu figure in this small stone plaque are revealed by his sharp facial features, including raised narrow eyes, and his armour. Narasimha wears a *vanamala*, or long garland of wild flowers, which is his *Vaishnava* cognisance. He is shown in an animated posture, his left leg raised to entrap his opponent and left arm stretched out to deliver a blow.[1]

The plaque's small scale indicates that this is an object for personal devotional use. Similar stone plaques with pierced work from the collection of Samuel Eilenberg at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, include a Bodhisattva (no. 1987.142.92)[2] and another Narasimha, similar to this example (no. 1987.142.90).[3]

1 For another interesting depiction of Narasimha from the northwest, see Cat. 62.

2 Lerner and Kossak 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

3 Accessed online, 20 July 2011, at http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/collection_database/asian_art/narasimha_the_man_lion_incarnation_of_vishnu_killing//objectview.aspx?oID=60005425&collID=6&dd1=6.

4

NORTH AND CENTRAL INDIA

< Detail of Cat. 125

69 Fifteen heads and busts

Mauryan period, *c.*400–200 BC
Mathura region
Terracotta

69.1 MALE HEAD
H. 4 cm
EAX.193
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 1

69.2 HEAD
H. 5.4 cm
EAX.194
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 2

69.3 FEMALE HEAD AND UPPER PART OF FIGURINE
(broken off below breasts; back shows three braids falling to waist, each stamped with circles containing seven dots)
h. 8 cm
EAX.195
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', Oriental Art, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 3a–b

69.4 FRAGMENT OF FEMALE FIGURINE
(breaks on back presumably indicate the original presence of plaits)
H. 8.8 cm
EAX.196
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 4

69.5 HEAD
H. 3.9 cm
EAX.197
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 5

69.6 HEAD
(broken off at neck, face damaged)
H. 5 cm
EAX.198
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 6

69.7 HEAD
(headdress partially preserved)
H. 4 cm
EAX.199
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 7

69.8 HEAD
H. 4.5 cm
EAX.200
Purchased from the collection of Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: M. Neff, 'Some Indian Terracottas at Oxford', *Oriental Art*, n.s 11, 2, 1956, fig. 8

69.9 FEMALE HEAD
H. 5.1 cm
EA1958.43

69.10 MAURYAN HEAD
(rider, with torso and portion of saddle still attached)
H. 8.8 cm
EA1958.50

69.11 HEAD
H. 5.2 cm
EA1958.51

69.12 MALE HEAD
(fragment from a jar)
H. 4.5 cm
EA1958.52 (two views illustrated)

69.13 HEAD
H. 4 cm
EA1967.87
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

69.14 FEMALE HEAD
H. 6.9 cm
EA1967.88
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

69.15 MALE HEAD
(the figure '1617' written in white paint on the back)
H. 5.1 cm
EA1985.28
Gift of Douglas Barret

69.1

69.3

69.2

69.4

69.5

69.6

69.7

69.8

Large numbers of terracotta objects in this style are known from the Upper Ganga Valley, most of them from sites in and around modern Mathura.[1] Complete examples have moulded heads such as these affixed onto modelled bodies. Although more elaborate mother and child figures and elephant riders are known,[2] the most commonly found anthropomorphic terracottas are of females that stand with their arms outstretched at about 45–60 degrees up from the waist, akin to figures on contemporary ring-stones.[3] The heads are usually long and elegant; they face upward, with large, elongated eyes and slightly pursed lips. The exaggerated eyes, skilfully emphasised with a double incised outline, immediately catch one's attention. Females wear large medallions or lotuses over rows of beads on their foreheads, prominent earrings and elaborate girdles – which, like the faces, are all separately stamped and then affixed onto the modelled bodies. Complete pieces show the hair arranged in looping plaits that swing down to the middle of their waists. When earrings are visible they are disc-shaped. Apart from the coiffure, scant attention is paid to the reverse of the figures, with only the most basic features being marked. Typically, the pieces are reduction-fired, resulting in their grey colour.[4]

Male figures are less common and are usually found riding elephants (cat. 69.10). They have similar facial features but are less ornamented, and typically wear turbans with a large element projecting to one side. An unusual piece (cat. 69.12) shows a head that still adheres to a part of a pot. Fragments of pots with applied human heads on their shoulders to act as decorative lug handles are recorded from a number of Early Historic sites in North India and Pakistan.

Pieces in this style have been excavated from several sites in the region, building up a more secure basis for dating them. In most excavations, as at Ahichhatra and Mathura, the figures were found in a level representing a long period of habitation. Their dark grey colour and reduction-firing might be a legacy of techniques used to make Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), usually taken as a sign for the start of the Early Historic phase in North Indian archaeology. Excavations at Mathura have shown these figures became less common around 200 BC, when they overlapped with the flat, single moulded plaques (usually associated with the 'Shunga / Mitra' period) before disappearing in the first century BC.[5] The most scientific of recent excavations where similar fragments have been found is the site of Sonkh, 30 km southwest of Mathura, where they have been dated mostly to the Mauryan phase; however, some pieces in this style have also been found in the succeeding period.[6]

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1 Similar pieces have also been found at Sonkh, Kaushambi, Ahichhatra and other major Early Historic sites in the Upper and Middle Ganga Velley.

2 Male figures are more unusual and are mostly found riding elephants. The riders wear their hair in topknots covered with turbans that form a bulbous focus on one side of their heads.

3 Comparable figures on ring-stones are dated between 400–100 BC. Some of these issues are discussed by S. P. Gupta, *The Roots of Indian Art: A Detailed Study of the Formative Period of Indian Art and Architecture: 3rd and 2nd Centuries* BC – *Mauryan and Late Mauryan*, New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1980, pp. 141–3, 145, 166, 181–2.

4 For similar pieces see V. S. Agrawala, *Mathura Terracotta*, Varanasi: Prithvi Prakashan, 1984 (original impression *JUPHS*, 1936); P. Pal, *Indian Sculpture, a catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 132–4; also Patna Museum (Arch 7168), in P. L. Gupta, ed., *Patna Museum Catalogue of Antiquities*, Patna, 1965, pl. LII.

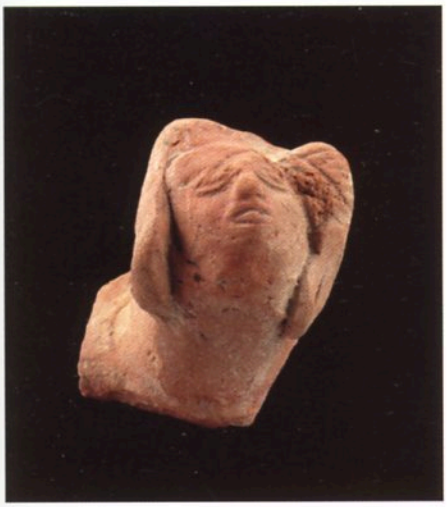
5 M. C. Joshi, *Indian Archaeology: A Review*, 1973–4, ed. B. K. Thapar, Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 31–2; 1974–5, pp. 48–50; 1976–7, pp. 54–6; see also essay by M. C. Joshi in D. M. Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage*, 1989; and in A. Ghosh, ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, pp. 283–6.

6 H. Härtel,'Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura District', with contributions by H. J. Paech and R. Weber, in *Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie*, vol. 9, Berlin, 1993, pp. 94–5.

69.9

69.10

69.11



69.12

69.13

69.14

69.15

Late or Post-Mauryan, *c.*second–first centuries BC
Mathura region
Terracotta
H. 5.8 cm
EA1967.84
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

The face of this small head of a boy, now detached, was made by pressing red clay into a mould and firing it to an orange terracotta colour. Although the technique of attaching heads with moulded faces to modelled bodies became popular in the Mauryan period in this region, the style endured, remaining popular in subsequent periods. The soft features of this fragment are akin to contemporary pieces found at Bulandibagh and Buxar,[1] and are not unknown in Mathura.[2] The boy's ears, along with a rounded element and two pellets on his head, are all that remain of the decoration that would have been applied separately, before the piece was fired.

1 P. L. Gupta, *Patna Museum Catalogue of Antiquities*, Patna, 1965, pls. XXXIX, XLVI (right), XLVII.
2 A style found in level III at Sonkh, making it contemporary with single-moulded plaques and the last traces of Mauryan grey terracotta figures.

71 Fragmentary bust of a goddess

*c.*Second century BC
Probably Buxar, Bihar
Terracotta
H. 10.5 cm
EA1999.28

This piece is one of very few known examples of its type outside India.[1] The terracottas from the site of Buxar in Bihar, although similar in style to the pieces from the Middle Ganga Valley, also include a greater number of certain distinctive types of terracotta sculpture in the Mauryan and post-Mauryan periods.[2] The hand-modelled body with a moulded face is in keeping with the general style of Mauryan terracotta figurines found in the Upper Ganga Valley (at Mathura, Ayodhya, Atranjikhera and elsewhere). However, that is where the similarity ends. Usually seated, these figures are found with their legs supporting the sculpture in front, while a stump at the back completes the tripod that balances the figures.[3] They have slim hips and prominent breasts, and their outstretched arms are lifted sideways to below shoulder level. Their smiling, moulded faces are topped by the most remarkable coiffures, turbans and hats. The figures wear little jewellery and are relatively undecorated, excepting the over-emphasised headgear and prominent earrings. This limited ornament is sometimes stamped with a whirling *chakra* or rosette, and is incised or stippled.

In the post-Mauryan period the partially moulded features of the Mauryan terracotta tradition continue. At the same time, in their slimmer body type, softer facial features and elaborate headgear, these figures anticipate the types of moulded plaques popular in the first century BC. The distinct style of the pieces from Buxar demonstrates how local traditions and styles developed by a particular guild existed within a wider sculptural tradition. Most of these pieces are now housed in either the Patna Museum or in the site museum at Buxar, built upon the private collection of Shri Sitaram Upadhyay.

It should also be noted how rarely this type of figure is recorded at other sites. Sonkh, near Mathura, is one place that has revealed some terracotta figures similar to those from Buxar at post-Mauryan levels. As it is one of the most scientifically excavated sites in the recent past in the subcontinent, Sonkh provides us with the most up-to-date standard against which these objects can be studied. The site has shown much continuity between Mauryan and post-Mauryan terracottas, with the similarities and differences between the figures of these periods being noted by Herbert Härtel, the excavator.[4] It is likely that the chronology of many of the 'Mauryan' pieces, particularly the ones that resemble this piece from Buxar, were produced slightly later than previously believed. Their style seems to have derived from terracotta images of around the fourt century BC and continued into the late second, or even the early first, century BC. This means that they were coeval, for at least a part of their history, with the fully moulded plaques. The site of Kaushambi has also produced similar figures, which ar now in the Allahabad Museum.[5] The style was shared with figures made from other materials. A small rock crystal pendant

72 Elephant

from Sonpur near Gaya in Bihar[6] is fashioned in the style of a Buxar face; it wears the same type of elaborate hat with lateral extensions.

1 A three-legged sculpture possibly from this region (though it is more likely that it comes from the vicinity of Mathura) is in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (no. 27.126).

2 Buxar is a prolific site that has received scant archaeological attention. Situated in Bhojpur district, on the Ganga, the river cuts sharply into the mound. The site has revealed many terracotta images of both the Mauryan and post-Mauyan periods. However, habitation at the site can be traced, on account of the presence of Northern Black Polished Ware, Black and Red Ware and Grey Ware, to about 600–400 BC. It seems occupation at the site began to decline in the third century AD, until a medieval fort was built there. For a general note on the archaeology of Buxar, see A. Ghosh, ed., *Indian Archaeology: A Review*, 1963–4, Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India, 1967, p. 8.

3 Similar pieces are in the collection of the Sitaram Upadhyay Site Museum, Buxar. Other comparable pieces are in the Patna Museum (nos. 6605, 6607, 6588, 6299, 6300): a few of these are published, see S. A. Shere, *Terracotta Figures in the Patna Museum*, Patna: Patna Museum, 1961 and P. L. Gupta, ed., 1965, *op. cit.*, pp. 255–68.

4 Härtel 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–9. Although 'Mauryan' figures are found in Period II at Sonkh, the figures closest in style to those from Buxar are found in Period III. Historically this covers the time from the close of the 'Sunga Cultural Phase' to the end of the Mitra dynasty of Mathura and the appearance of the Ksatrapas. Fifty-five terracotta objects were found from stratified spots that belong to Period III and these can be divided technically into three types. The most common type is the moulded plaque, with a flattened back pressed from an open mould. These are viewed upright, made from red clay that may fire in various hues of an orange-red to buff; they can sometimes carry a slip and are of the type with which we are already familiar from sites in the northwest and the Indo–Gangetic Divide. Second are the freestanding, handmade figures. These can, like their Period II (Maurya) predecessors, have moulded faces. Commonly they are riders, although pieces have been found which appear to be shaped as three-legged figures (akin, at least conceptually, to figures from Buxar in Bihar) or, rarely, as figures with wings. On the whole, they are less skilfully fashioned than those from Buxar. The excavations at Sonkh and some other sites have shown the presence of part-modelled, part-moulded figures from Kushan levels as well. Clearly then, while the technique seems to have been most popular in the Mauryan period, it should not be taken as the only distinguishing feature for dating the pieces. The third and last type found at Sonkh in this period are double-moulded figures which may or may not be hollow. The hollow ones are nearly always covered in white slip.

5 S. C. Kala, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980, figs. 128–30.

6 Gupta 1980, *op. cit.*, pl. 109b; also Oppi Untracht, *Traditional Jewelry of India*, New York: Abrams, 1997, no. 310, p. 170.

c. Third century BC
Mauryan
Grey terracotta
L. 10.8 cm
EA1967.82
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

Modelled elephants with variously stamped decoration are a characteristic feature of Mauryan urban centres. A few complete examples have been found together with their riders. These objects range in size from 10 to 25 cm, and when complete display uncharacteristically short hindquarters, balancing a large, proud head tilting upward. The eyes, as with most other animal figures of the time, are incised lozenges (compare the contemporaneous head of a cow, Cat. 28). The trunk is invariably stamped with rosettes while the neck is richly garlanded with pendant ornaments and leaves. This piece still bears trappings that show it was meant to appear richly caparisoned, like a royal or processional elephant, with a saddle and traces of its rider.

73 Fragment with animals and birds (jeweller's mould?)

*c.*Third–second centuries BC
Kaushambi, Mauryan
Soapstone
H. 4.1, W. 4.7 cm
EA1996.74

The fragmentary reddish-mauve stone is of irregular shape, with two rows of converging bands of animals (deer and griffin) and birds forming the corner of a triangle within which traces of scrolling tendrils are seen. Although it is not certain exactly what the function of this little piece would have been, it may have been used as a jeweller's mould. The iconography of winged creatures is connected with changeability and harnessing the power of different elements, like the semi-divine world of *yakshas*. They were regarded as possessing talismanic power – which explains why jewellery was often made with such imagery – and auspiciousness, making them frequently appear on the outer railings of religious shrines at sites such as Bodh Gaya and Sanchi.

This style of carving in a soft stone is known from a handful of other pieces from this period. The motifs of leaping deer and winged lions are widespread, and are carved in a style typical of the late centuries BC. They also occur on the early stupa railings from Kaushambi and Sarnath, where they can be dated to the late Mauryan period.[1] This piece is also comparable to the small soapstone discs and ring-stones that have been found mainly in Murtaziganj, Bihar, and at other major Early Historic sites.[2]

1 Gupta 1980, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–36, 66–72, 99–128.
2 P. K. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Mother-Goddess Votive Discs*, Varanasi: Indica Books, 1993, figs. 31, 39, 50, 51, among others. Winged griffins of very similar style can also be seen at Bharhut: see P. Chandra, *The Sculpture of India, 3000 B.C. –1300 A.D.*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1985, no. 30B.

74 Carved lion-shaped bead

*c.*Second century BC–first century AD
Upper or Middle Ganga Valley
Carnelian
L. 1.5 cm approx.
EAX.7427
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities

Beads of semi-precious stones are commonly found from the immediately post-Mauryan period. They are often carved into rosettes, lotuses, buds, deer, elephants, fish, birds and lions, like this one. Others are plainly amuletic, carved into the forms of *triratnas*, *shrivatsas*, *nandipadas* and other auspicious emblems. Ancient India provides ample sculptural and literary evidence to support the view that beads and other forms of jewellery were carefully fashioned with consideration of their talismanic function. Comparable lion-shaped beads dated between the third century BC and the third century AD are variously recorded from sites ranging between Taxila[1] in the northwest to Nasik[2] in Maharashtra and Kaushambi[3] across the North Indian plains, as well as the Nepalese Terai.

1 H. C. Beck, 'Beads from Taxila', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* 65, Delhi, 1941, pl. VII nos. 3–7.
2 H. D. Sankalia and S. B. Deo, *Report on the Excavation at Nasik and Jorwe 1950–51*, Deccan College, Poona, 1955, p. 88, pl. XXI.2.
3 Unpublished, in the collection of the Allahabad Museum.

75 Talismanic seal or an amulet

c.200 BC
Probably from the Middle Ganga Valley
(Kaushambi or Rajghat)
Polished red sandstone
L. 3.3 cm approx.
EAX.7426
Transferred from the Department of Antiquities

This is a small, rare type of cylinder seal or amulet with three reels or grooves that define two bands containing rows of animals. Some of the animals, such as the leonine beast with the beak of a bird of prey or the spotted deer with feline face, are mythical; they are set against a stippled background, with a palm tree interspersed between them. Each of the two flat ends of the cylinder bears the face of an animal-eared humanoid, a fairly standard type, representing a mythical *yaksha* figure.

Such *yakshas* (and *yakshis*) inhabited the world between that of mortals and that of the gods. They held magical powers of emanation and could change their form at will; myths abound about their changeable appearances as ideal men and irresistible women, as foetus- and child-stealing graspers, as powerful *nagas* or serpents of the waters and the netherworld, or as fantastic creatures. Their presence is an appropriate terminus on either side of the amulet. Although these powerful creatures were at times malevolent spirits, believed to be the harbingers of disease and misfortune, their propitiation ensured their benevolence. It is thus possible that this small, seal-like object was actually a talisman. It may have been either contained in an amulet box or suspended on a chain or cord that encircled the grooves on the cylinder.

This iconography is akin to the fantastic animals and *yakshas* seen on reliefs at Sarnath, Kaushambi, Bodhgaya and other post-Mauryan Buddhist stupa railings. The style of the palm trees and the quality of the stone are not dissimilar to contemporary post-Mauryan ring- and disc-stones also known to have been produced in the Middle Ganga Valley.

An almost identical piece, although not in as good condition and made of terracotta, was found at Rajghat, Varanasi, and is now in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi. The *yaksha* face on the cylinder's ends is missing, and these are instead carved or stamped with a *triratna*-like symbol resembling a Brahmi 'ma'.[1]

1 P. K. Agrawala 1993, fig. 86.

76 Inscription fragment

Mauryan or post-Mauryan period, third to second centuries BC
North India
Red sandstone
L. 13.5 cm
EA2013.121
Bequest of Douglas and Mary Barrett

This fragment from a larger inscription is lenticular in shape and probably comes from a Buddhist stupa in North India. It is inscribed in the characteristically clear early Brahmi characters of the third to second centuries BC. Only the opening letters of the inscription are preserved: they read '*dhammarakhi*[*ta*?]'[1], the Prakrit form of the Sanskrit '*dharmarakṣita*'. This can be roughly translated as 'protector or keeper of the faith' (*dharma*), a known honorific; or it might be a first name of the person to whom this inscription would have referred.

1 Although the consonant '*kha*' is nearly always seen with a dot or circle at the end of the hook below the vertical, it is absent in the Delhi-Topra Mauryan pillar edict. Considering that red sandstone was a valued sculptural medium in the region where that pillar would originally have stood, one may propose that this inscription comes from a site in the north Indian plains (i.e. Punjab, Haryana or Uttar Pradesh). It is not clear if the fragmentary penultimate letter ends in a circle at the end of the vertical, in which case it should be read as '*va*'. However, if it simply forked open at the bottom, or if the circle were left open at the bottom (as is recorded in other inscriptions, including those from the Mathura, Haryana or Uttar Pradesh areas), it would be a '*ta*'. This would allow the word to be read as '*dhammarakhita*', which of course we know from other inscriptions as well.

77 *Yakshi* head

*c.*180–160 BC
Bharhut, Central India
Red sandstone
H. 8.5 cm
EA2000.25

This head of a female figure from the Central Indian Buddhist site of Bharhut belongs to a *yakshi* or *devata*, female deities of nature that were popularly represented at Buddhist stupas in the post-Mauryan period. Typically these *yakshis* would adorn the bas-reliefs on the *vedika* or stone fence that enclosed the stupa. While the stupa itself contained the relics of either the Buddha himself or of one of his disciples, or something that he had touched or used which radiated his energy, the *vedika* bore representations of the popular face of Buddhist worship. These included narratives from the Jataka myths, scenes of worship, ceremonial processions and festivities, along with several *yakshis* and *yakshas* (their male counterparts).

The *yakshi* bears tattoo marks on her cheeks. These are in the shape of the sun and the moon, and she wears a decorated mantle that covers her head.[1] Her centrally parted hair frames the upper portion of her face and covers a part of the *tika* on her forehead. The sculpture is executed in shallow relief in red sandstone.

Bharhut was one of the most important early Indian stupas and is of great art historical significance. It has been taken as a benchmark against which all subsequent styles of relief sculpture in India are judged. Bharhut is also of seminal importance iconographically in establishing a visual lexicon of symbols and images in Indian art. In this regard, perhaps its greatest value is that the *yakshis* and *yakshas* are labelled in the Brahmi script; this provides incontrovertible evidence for the worship of such autochthonous nature sprites in Early Historic India. Although there is controversy about dating the stupa and its imagery between the late third century BC and the mid-first century BC, most scholars assign it to the mid-second century BC.

The most important collection of Bharhut sculptures is in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. The small size of this piece and the absence of the high polish evident on the fine Bharhut pieces in Kolkata perhaps indicate that this would have formed part of a subsidiary narrative relief. This is one of the few fragments of Bharhut carving that can be seen outside India.

1 Cf. A. Cunningham, *The Stupa of Bharhut*, London: 1879, pl. LII, pp. 39ff., for facial tattoo marks; and pp. 34–5 for forehead ornaments, as in this example. See also A. K. Coomaraswamy, *La Sculpture de Bharhut*, Annales du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque d'Art, n.s., 6, Paris: Vanoset, 1956, fig. 114 on pl. XXXVIII, which shows an almost identical face of a lady, this time tattooed with an *ankush* on her cheek, fig. 55 on pl. XXI and fig. 21 on pl. VII. Information to aid an interpretation that these tattoo marks were auspicious has been collated by Basu, Chandreyi, 'Elephant Goads and Other Marks on Female Figures in Bhārhut', in Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Linda Lojda, eds., *Changing Forms and Cultural Identity: Religious and Secular Iconographies*, Papers from the 20th Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeology, vol. 1, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014, pp. 9–22.

78 Three fragmentary female terracotta plaques

78.1

78.2

78.3

c. First century BC

78.1 FEMALE FIGURINE
Northern Indian plains or Upper Ganga Valley
H. 9.2 cm
EA1958.40

The heavily worn moulded plaque shows a standard Early Historic goddess of the weaponed goddess type standing with her left arm akimbo. The damaged right hand falls by her side. The rounded face is surmounted by a broken lotus medallion, on either side of which her hair is arranged in two large chignons; foliage or weapons may have issued from the broken one on the right.[1] Ribbons flow down from each of them. Typically, one of the goddess's earrings is shown as a disc in profile, the other as an extended plug. A long necklace partially covers her girdle, worn low across her broad hips. There are traces of drapery below the girdle and over the left arm. The lower half of the figurine is broken away.

78.2 FEMALE HEAD
Ganga Valley
EA1967.75
H. 4.7 cm
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin collection)

This head of a female figure is from a typical post-Mauryan moulded plaque. She wears a pair of discoid earrings partially covered by the style of her hair, divided into two large chignons on either side of her head.

78.3 HEAD AND UPPER HALF OF A FEMALE PLAQUE
Middle Ganga Valley
H. 4.9 cm
EA1958.41

The plaque conforms to the common type of moulded terracotta impressions from the Early Historic period. It depicts a slim figure with a large head; her hair is arranged in two large chignons. She has a round face with a broad forehead and wears large earrings. The plaque is heavily worn, and the decoration on mantle and ribbons has been rubbed away.

1 For a study of the wider iconographic spread of this type, see N. P. Ahuja, 'Changing Gods, Enduring Rituals', in C. Jarrige and V. Lefèvre, eds., *South Asian Archaeology* 2001, vol. 11, Paris, 2005, pp. 345–54.

79 Finial in the form of a double-sided female figurine

Second–first centuries BC
North India
Bronze
H. 3.7 cm
EA2000.44

This tiny finial or knop is cast as a standard Early Historic Indian goddess figure. She stands, buxom and broad-hipped, with her arms falling by her side. Her headdress is concentrated into two chignons with a long ribbon attached to each; traces of earrings and a short necklace are visible. The image is identical on both sides except for the greater wear to one surface. An almost identical metal piece has been excavated at Ropar, Punjab,[1] and this type of figure is frequently found carved on the sloping inner circlet of Mauryan-style ring-stones, apart from, of course, the many terracotta statuettes and plaques that represent a female figure in precisely the same way. Considering they are found from Gandhara to Bengal, this consistency invites speculation as to whom the iconography of these figurines refers to.[2] However, even though there is a rare occurrence when this type has been found in the relic caskets of stupas, secure information of the specific contexts of their archaeological discovery at sites remains too sporadic to know for certain whom this image referred to or what ritual function it may have performed.

1 In the collection of the ASI, Ropar Site Museum, no. 2–2545; see Y. D. Sharma,'Past Patterns of Living as unfolded by excavations at Rupar', *Lalit Kala* 1–2, 1955–6, pp. 121–9, fig. 14. Compare also Cat. 30, the amber figurine, in this catalogue.

2 N. P. Ahuja, 'A Buddhist interpretation of small finds in the Early Historic Period', (forthcoming 2018).

80 Spout in the form of a male figure

Second–first centuries BC
North India
Lead
H. 6 cm
EA1999.25

This unusual lead fragment is cast as a thin male figure with a prominent phallus spout. He wears a short collar over a bare torso with defined pectorals and a dhoti. His turban is arranged with a projection to one side, a common feature of the period. The back of the piece is flat, with only the most basic lines giving the figure some definition. A prominent bronze socket to be attached to a vessel or pipe is fixed to the figure's hips, making it clear that the piece was utilitarian in nature.

81 Male face, fragment

Possibly late Mauryan to Kushan period, *c.*second century BC–first century AD
North India
Bone
H. 1 cm
EA1993.30

Very little is known about the everyday arts of the Mauryan and post-Mauryan period. However, the fragmentary remains testify to a sophisticated urban culture, in which objects of ivory, bone, bronze and even silver and gold were used alongside finely moulded terracottas. This tiny male head is carefully carved with deep-set eyes, full lips and a broad nose. The figure's hairstyle, to the extent that it is visible, is unusual, with locks falling onto the forehead.

The surviving remains of contemporary bone and ivory carving from Early Historic India attest to the sophistication of the artisans. This tiny face, for instance, shows a well proportioned face that would have been part of a larger figure. This fragment would have come from some utilitarian object, such as a comb, a handle for a mirror or a similar item of toilette.[1]

1 Compare Cats. 88 and 34, also 31.

82 Man with a goat

*c.*First century BC
Sugh, Haryana
Grey terracotta
H. 12.4 cm
EA1999.27

PUBLISHED: N. P. Ahuja, 'Further Studies Towards a Definition of the Style of Terracottas from the Indo–Gangetic Divide', in N. and M. Krishna, eds., *The Ananda-Vana of Indian Art: Dr. Anand Krishna Felicitation Volume*, Varanasi: Indica Books, 2004, pp. 47–58, pl. 9

The standing male figure wears a lion skin (or fur-lined cloak with a mask?). He holds a goat (or possibly a ram) on a tether with his right hand, while his left holds on to the animal's horn. A small dagger or knife is tucked into the belt below his right hand. Around his neck the figure wears a chain with three pendants: a long bead or amulet container between two others that resemble *nandipadas*.[1] Literally the shape of an imprint of a bull's hoof (resembling the Brahmi letter 'ma'), a *nandipada* is associated in later times with Shaivism. It is unclear whether the symbol is being referred to here as an iconographic cognisance. He also wears two elaborate earrings in each ear – one shaped like a flat disc, the other cylindrical, a feature that is common in the period and shared with the convention with which female figures are also shown (see Cat. 136).

This is the best preserved of the few known images of this iconography from Northern India; it is probably from Sugh, a site near Ambala fed by a tributary of the Yamuna.[2] Two similar pieces have been excavated at Rajghat,[3] and another at Tamluk. Yet another has been found at Chandraketugarh[4] and another at Taxila.[5] The occurrence of this image was thus widespread. Although the piece is pressed from a mould, no mould bearing this iconography has yet been found.

Moti Chandra catalogued a similar piece as a 'hunter'.[6] However, it might be worth speculating that it could equally represent a goat being led to a sacrifice, a practice popular in life as well as in myth. Equally it might represent Skanda, who is known to be associated with goats in the Mahabharata [3.217] and a ram. Shiva too can be associated with a goat; he famously ordered the sacrifice of the animal in order to use its head to replace the one he had, in his anger, severed from the neck of Daksha, his father-in-law. This imagery may thus refer to either of those deities. An iconography of Lubdhaka has also been suggested by Agrawala.[7] However, he does not immediately make it clear as to whether he uses the word *Lubdhaka* simply as the Sanskrit for 'hunter' (which is how Moti Chandra later used it) or whether he is referring to a specific character by that name.[8]

The headdress of both the Tamluk and Ashmolean (Sugh) pieces may be interpreted as zoomorphic. However, that is of no immediate help in identifying this figure. One may, all the same, speculate whether it is in the same vein as the much later manifestations of Shiva as *Gajasura Samhara Murti*, in which the god is seen either to wear, lift or dance inside the carcass of the elephant that he has vanquished. Finally, one must admit as more likely the possibility that, if the headdress is indeed zoomorphic, it may belong to the same traditions of masked rituals as seen in other examples of this period.[9]

1 This is the most typical arrangement of pendants in contemporaneous male imagery across Northern and Central India. However, instead of *nandipadas*, it is usually more common to find the bead between two *triratnas*. *A triratna* is a common omega 'Ω'-shaped symbol referring, in Buddhist contexts, to the triple-gem of the Buddha, his teachings, the *dharma*, and the monastic order of the sangha that maintains the dharma. A famous suite of pieces of gold jewellery fashioned in this shape is preserved in the Cleveland Museum of Art (acc. nos. 73.39–73.68).

2 For a summary of the archaeology and imagery of Sugh, see N. P. Ahuja, 'Moulded Terracottas from the Indo–Gangetic Divide, Sugh, Circa 200 BCE–50 CE', in P. Pal, ed., *Marg*, 2002, pp. 46–57, as well as 'Further Studies Towards a Definition of the Style of Terracottas from the Indo–Gangetic Divide', N. and M. Krishna, eds., *The Ananda-Vana of Indian Art, Dr. Anand Krishna Felicitation Volume*, Varanasi: Indica Books, 2004, pp. 47–58, pl. 9.

3 In the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan: see Moti Chandra, 'Terracottas in the Bharat Kala

Bhavan', in Anand Krishna, ed., *Chhavi 1*, Golden Jubilee Volume, Varanasi: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1971, fig. 60, p. 13, and V. S. Agrawala, 'Rajghat Terracottas', *JISOA*, vol. 9, 1941, p. 10, pl. 11, fig. 5. Another comparable piece from an unrecorded site in the collection of the State Museum, Lucknow (no. 59.216/9) appears to come from an Upper Ganga Valley site; see S. C. Kala, *Terracottas of North India in the State Museum Lucknow*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1993: p. 30, pl. 45.

4 S. S. Biswas, *Terracotta Art of Bengal*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1981, pl. LVII a–b, p. 190. The Tamluk piece is in the site museum and the Chandraketugarh piece is in a private collection. Biswas dates them to between the second and third centuries AD without explanation, when identical pieces have been excavated from stratified context in Taxila (n. 5 below) and commonly associated with other finds in a similar style from the first century BC found in the rest of the subcontinent.

5 Excavated from Bhir mound (stratum II), J. Marshall, *Taxila*, 3 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951: pl. 133, fig 32.

6 Chandra 1971, *op. cit.*

7 Biswas 1981, *op. cit.*

8 Biswas 1981, *op. cit.*, who follows Agrawala, also proposes the unlikely suggestion that it might be young Krishna as a cowherd. This is unlikely as we have no evidence of an association with Krishna in the iconography of this piece, nor is there another piece that might be classified as a young Krishna at this date. Lubdhaka is also the name of Sirius, the Dog Star; however, we do not have any conclusive evidence for the personification of the planets or constellations in Indian iconography at this date. S. K. Saraswati found the figure to be a hermaphrodite (*A Survey of Indian Sculptures*, Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957, pl. XIX, fig. 86, p. 116). While I do believe that this may be the case in some early terracotta figurines, this figure and iconography is, in my opinion, definitely male.

9 For another masked figure, compare the Ashmolean's EA1997.16 (cat. 142).

83 'Archaic Mother-goddess'

*c.*Second–first centuries BC
From the environs of Kaushambi
Terracotta
H. 8.2 cm
EA1967.53
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

This fragment preserves the upper part of a hand-modelled female figurine, with broad, rounded hips and prominent breasts above a very narrowly constricted waist. She has short, stumpy arms and an abstract face with a large pinched nose. Figurines of this type are found all over the northern part of the subcontinent, but minor differences of form can sometimes indicate in which region they were made.[1]

This figure is probably contemporaneous with the ones from Sar Dheri in the Northwest Frontier (cat. 29) and the type of steatopygous figurines seen on Mauryan ringstones. The body type is also recorded on the gold plaques found inside the Buddhist stupas at Lauriya Nandangarh and Piprahwa, and found attached to troughs that may have had a ritual use. All of these comparable images can be dated to between the third and first centuries BC. Although one is increasingly cautious in using sweeping, old-fashioned nomenclature such as 'Mother-Goddess' to describe such figurines, the widespread and consistent production of this figure type, combined with its distinctive abstraction and stylisation, make a convincing case for them having cultic associations.

The pinched face may be related to bird-faced female figurines. Fantastic female forms with the heads of flowers, birds or snakes are consistently found in the northern subcontinent. They have also been found in other parts of the ancient world, where they have been frequently equated with variant forms of archaic earth goddesses.

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1 A near parallel from Kaushambi is in the collection of the Allahabad Museum (no. 9–1): S. C. Kala, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980, fig. 12, p. 12; Kala also lists several other similar pieces. Also compare Cat. 47 in this catalogue.

84 Boxers

*c.*100 BC
Probably Kaushambi, Middle Ganga Valley
Terracotta
H. 8.5, W. 6.8 cm
EA1997.251

Two men face one another, each with a raised arm ending in a fist that appears to be bound or covered. They are animated and are shown moving towards each other. Each man wears a short, tight-fitting dhoti that ends above his knees, with his long hair piled on his head in a topknot. Six small flowers are scattered in the background. The whole scene would have been framed by a stippled border, only traces of which now remain.

While wrestling boys are shown on stone reliefs in Gandhara in a variety of contexts: on bodybuilders' weights, positioned around the goddess Hariti's feet, or in depictions of the young prince Siddhartha's education,[1] boxers are rare. Although it could be argued that the men are dancing, the images on two other plaques in the Bharat Kala Bhavan (one from Rajghat and the other from Kaushambi)[2] make a case for this plaque showing men engaged in a combative sport. However, this does not mean that the scene is not festive; indeed the comparable images undoubtedly point in the direction of ancient Indian fairs and festivals.

The Rajghat plaque is complex. Three scenes occupy its upper portion: a cock-fight, a bullfight and a pair of men in the same attitude as in the Ashmolean plaque. Considering the rest of the Rajghat plaque concerns fighting birds and animals, it would be natural that these men are also wrestling or boxing. V. S. Agrawala has identified this scene as the ancient sport (*krida*) of *maushta* that is mentioned in Panini's sutra IV.2.57. He further cites the *Brahmajala Sutta* of the *Dighanikaya* which details the sports prohibited for Buddhist monks. These include bullfights (*vrish-abha–yuddha*), cockfights (*kukkuta–yuddha*) and *mutthi–yuddha* or fist fights – the three sports we see represented on the upper half of the Rajghat plaque.[3] The other imagery on the same plaque includes a set of jars and an extraordinary scene of an elephant riding a cart drawn by four other elephants. Agrawala thus identified the whole scene as one depicting the many types of festivities and sport that were presumably held periodically (perhaps even ritually held, as he has demonstrated elsewhere).[4]

The Kaushambi plaque also depicts an elephant on a chariot pulled by other elephants. Significantly it does not show anything else: the entire frame is filled with this single scene. It is worth speculating that it might have formed a part of a series of plaques, put up together to portray the many activities in festivals.[5] The plaque of the boxers now in the Ashmolean may have been part of such an arrangement.

1 I. Kurita, *Gandharan Art*, 2 vols., Tokyo: Nigensha Publications, 1988, images 90–91, 93–95, 104; for the Dioscuri wrestling at Hariti's feet. see N. P. Ahuja, 'The British Museum Hariti: Toward Understanding Transculturalism in Gandhara', in S. E. Alcock et. al. eds., *Beyond Boundaries: Connecting Visual Cultures in the Provinces of Ancient Rome*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2016, pp. 247–63, fig. 15.9.; and for body-builders' weights, see Metropolitan Museum no. 1994.112, and R. Russek, *Buddha: Zwischen Ost und West, Skulpturen aus Gandhara Pakistan*, exhib. cat., Zurich: Museum Rietberg, 1987, no. 95, pp. 82–3.

2 The Rajghat plaque (Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, no. 4827) is discussed by V. S. Agrawala [1953], 'A Unique Terracotta Plaque from Rajghat', *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India*, no. 2, 1951–2, pp. 82–5, pl. XIV, and Chandra 1971, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–15, no. 56. For the Kaushambi plaque (Bharat Kala Bhavan, no. 2/23162) see N. P. Ahuja, *Early Indian Moulded Terracotta, The Emergence of an Iconography and Variations in Style, c.200 BC–AD 200*, Ph.D. dissertation, London: SOAS, University of London, 2001, pp.135–6.

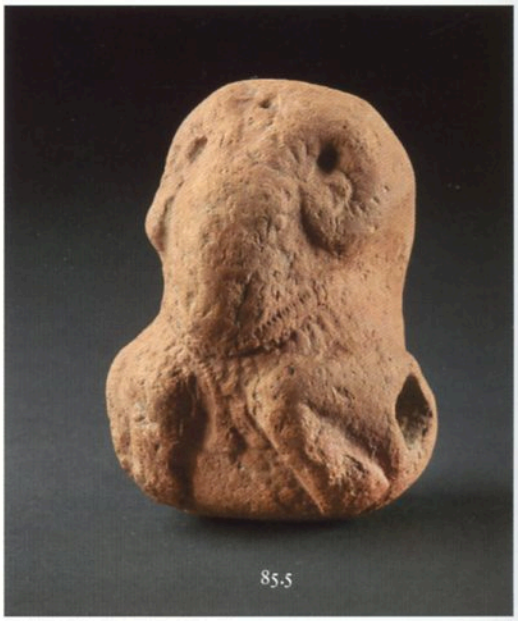
3 Agrawala 1953, *op cit*. For a scene of similarly attired wrestlers on a roundel from the stupa at Bharhut see Coomaraswamy 1956, *op. cit.*, fig. 90 on pl. XXXIII.

4 Agrawala 1953, *op cit*.

5 That different plaques were put up together to be able to make up one narrative, or that more than one individually moulded plaques were hung up together to be read as part of one scene, have been suggested by me in another context: Ahuja 2004, *op. cit.*, p. 53, pls. 1, 11–12, 14.

85 Five ram- or bull-shaped push toys

85.3 85.4 85.4



85.5

Post-Mauryan period, first century BC–first century AD
Terracotta

85.1 RAM PUSH TOY
H. 9.5 cm
EA1967.58
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

85.2 RAM PUSH TOY
H. 9.5 cm
EA1967.59
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

85.3 RAM PUSH TOY
H. 9.5 cm
EA1967.60
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

85.4 RAM PUSH TOY
H. 7.2 cm
EA1967.61
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

85.5 RAM PUSH TOY
H. 9 cm
EA X.191

85.5 reverse 85.2

One of the most commonly found types of terracotta push toy is shaped like a ram or a bull with his forelegs tucked under its chest. It has a large head with spiralling or curved horns and wears strings of beads around its neck and a floral medallion on its forehead. Some examples have a bell hanging from the animal's neck. All have a socket at the back to hold a stick by which the toy would be pushed along, and a hole that runs through the base to accommodate an axle with wheels. The animal's body is sometimes stippled. The front, that is the sculpted portion of the piece, is pressed from a mould. These pieces are usually well fired to a buff or orange colour.

Push toys shaped like bulls or rams are among the most popular types of terracottas. They have been found at most Early Historic terracotta sites including Taxila, Kaushambi, Sugh and Chandraketugarh. However, the widest variety of push toys has come from Kaushambi and its neighbouring sites.[1]

1 For excavated examples with notes on their stratigraphy, see G. R. Sharma, 'Excavations at Kausambi, 1949–50', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 74, Delhi: Govt. of India, 1969, pls. XXVIII a–d, XLII.

86 Toy cart with oxen

Second–first centuries BC
Kaushambi
Terracotta
H. 10.5 cm
EA0S.781

This red terracotta toy cart has three moulded walls; they rest on a platform pierced with a hole that once accommodated an axle. Terracotta wheels – several detached examples of which have been found in the north of India where these carts were popular – would have been attached to either end of the axle. The front wall is decorated with a pair of yoked oxen surrounded by floral motifs. A socket is present in the platform below the front wall; it might have been linked with another wheeled draught animal (see Cat. 85) or have been used to pull the cart along. The tops of the side walls are curved and bear bands of incised ribbing radiating from a floral medallion in the centre of each wall, a design used for contemporary chariots. These carts were most popular in the Upper Ganga Valley.[1]

1 For similar pieces from the Kaushambi area in the collection of the Lucknow Museum (nos. 79.14.6 and 60.95.3), see Kala 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–3, pls. 278–9.

87 Figurine of a boy

c. First century AD
North India
Terracotta
H. 6.8 cm
EA1958.47

This small plaque of a boy shows him with the body of a baby: his belly protrudes, his little arms are held up to his chest and he has a disproportionately large head. The piece is broken off below the hip. If complete it would, to judge by similar examples, have shown his slightly bent, weak and podgy legs falling on either side of him, along with, curiously, large, engorged genitals. This last feature led V. S. Agrawala to call these figurines *yakshas*.[1] They are sometimes double-moulded (but never hollow), and are often seen wearing a pendant on a short necklace and the traditional protective thread around the hip. Other semi-divine figures like the playful dwarf *ganas* and *pretas*, or skeletal spirits of the dead, also have engorged genitals.

Increasingly, the discoveries in terracotta and ivory from this period are bringing to light some persistent themes or preoccupations of contemporary cultic practices. One of them is the protection of young boys and the celebration of their births. Early Indian literature is replete with examples of demons and ogresses – no doubt derived from the ancient world of *yakshis* – who either fed on children or caused them to die of some incurable illness (thus in effect abducting them from their parents) or brought about miscarriages. An object like this may therefore well be a votive offering made to protect children or pregnant women.

In his excavations at Sonkh, Härtel found these plaques (which he prefers to call 'boyish figures' rather than '*yakshas*') from Mitra levels through the Kshatrapa and Kushan levels: they were thus known at Sonkh for about 200 years.[2] He found further iconographic variations in the plaques which led him to separate them into two broad categories: 'boyish figures' and 'nude dwarfish male figures' – without adequate explanation as to what the real or interpretative differences between them may be.[3] However, Härtel has rightly noted that the figures may hold their clenched fists in various positions: at the hips, groin, waist or drawn up to the chest.

1 Agrawala 1984 [1936], *op. cit.*, fig. 39, p. 32. For comparable pieces from other sites, see V. S. Agrawala, 'The terracottas of Ahichhatra', originally in *Ancient India* 4, 1947–8, pl. XXXVI, p. 119, reprinted Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1985.

2 Härtel 1993, *op. cit.*, figs. 156–61, 206–20, pp. 126ff.

3 'Unlike the Boyish Figures ... the Nude Dwarfs are not normally really pot-bellied' is the only, slight difference that the author mentions – and then it is only occasionally noted: Härtel 1993, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

88 Anthropomorphic handle

First century BC
Northern India, perhaps Kaushambi
Bone
H. 10.5 cm
EA1991.54

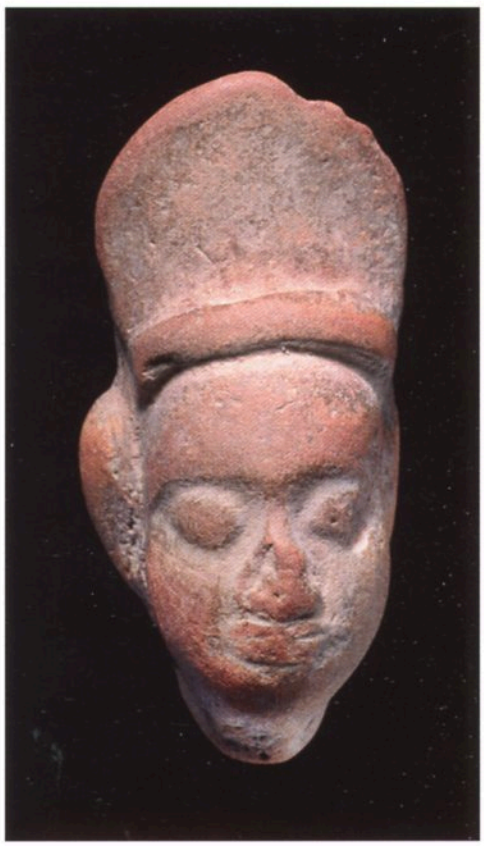
PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, 'Artefacts of the Historical Period from Bannu', *South Asian Archaeology* 1987, Part 2, Rome, 1990, p. 654, fig. 10

This Early Historic piece is carved from bone in the form of a male figurine. It has a hole drilled through its length for the insertion of a metal or wood bolt to serve as a terminus to a piece of furniture or a handle to some other object. The figurine itself is in the typical style of the post-Mauryan period; this is exemplified particularly in the round face, turban and heavy earrings worn on subtended earlobes. He stands bare-chested, his right arm akimbo and the left drawn up to his chest. He wears a plain dhoti, held in place by a belt, and a short necklace.

Harle felt the figure would have been considered unsuitable for use as a mirror handle, since all the other examples of anthropomorphic mirror handles of this period are in female form. Yet the attribution of the term 'mirror handle' to these objects is in itself contentious.[1] Bone and ivory were frequently used for personal items such as combs, pins, cups and, rarely, even sacred images. In contrast to the other bone and ivory figures of this date from the rest of the subcontinent, this is simpler in its conception, devoid of the fine, ornamental decoration found in other examples.

1 J. C. Harle, 'Artefacts of the Historical Period from Bannu', *South Asian Archaeology* 1987, Part 2, Rome, p. 655. He further described it as made of conch shell, although it is more likely to be bleached bone. Compare with the bronze female figures from Bannu, Cat. 31 above, and the fragment of a bone cylinder, Cat. 34.

89 Head of a male (?) wearing a helmet



First century AD
Mathura
Terracotta
H. 4.8 cm
EA1967.86
Transferred from British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

The technique of pressing the faces of clay figures from moulds continued until the first century AD, when the style began to move toward a Kushan idiom. The facial features in these figures became more thickly set and, were the figure complete, we would probably have seen it attached to a hand-modelled body. This piece is crowned by an unusual tall, rounded helmet, flattened frontally and thus unlike the Phrygian or Scythian hats more familiar to us from Kushan times.

90 Head and upper part of a *yaksha*

c. First century BC
Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
Spotted red sandstone
H. 14.3 cm
EAOS.36
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan of Mathura, 1939

This *yaksha* is a miniature version of the well-known colossal *yakshas* of the immediately post-Mauryan period. The sculpture is heavily worn, especially on the face where its features are rendered indistinct, and is missing the arms. This figure is otherwise characteristically well built, like the giant *yakshas* that were no doubt the inspiration for this sculpture.[1] This is evident in the broad shoulders, strong chest and wide face, as well as in his adornment, which includes heavy and pendant earrings and a broad flat necklace falling in a typical 'V'-shape on his chest. However, faint traces of fine tooling on the necklace, the additional choker and excessive size of the earrings give the image a slightly more decorative feel, at times associated with the first century BC rather than the plainer images of the prior century.

Yakshas are as fanciful as they are powerful, capable of changing their form and being omnipresent. They were fundamentally associated with trees and other elements of nature, and were worshipped as protectors. By the first century BC their cult was undergoing major changes, as their supremacy began to give way to the emerging icons of the Buddha, Shiva, Vishnu and other major Indian deities. Where it could not be subdued, the *yaksha* cult was incorporated into the emerging popular cults as depotentiated semi-divine figures subservient to or participating in the entourage of the new gods.

1 See for instance the Parkham *Yaksha*, illustrated in most general surveys of Indian art, e.g. S. L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1985, p. 60 (no. 5.5). For a more specific reading of the *yakshas* of the region, see Gritli von Mitterwallner, 'Yakṣas of Ancient Mathura', in Doris M. Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: Tthe Cultural Heritage*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, pp. 354–71. The Parkham *Yaksha* is monumental in size and stood on the outskirts of the Parkham village, where this iconic image had been both a major centre of ritualistic activities and a landmark in the geography of that region.

91 Two coping stone pieces

91.1
Inscribed coping stone
Spotted red sandstone
Mathura, Uttar Pradesh
Pre-Kushan period, late first century BC–early first century AD
L. 97.8, H. 17.8 cm
EA1983.24
Purchased with the help of the Friends of the Ashmolean

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and Andrew Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 10

91.1

This slightly curving stone would have formed the capping or uppermost beam (*ushnisha*) of a stone fence (*vedika*) that enclosed a sacred space such as a tree shrine, the seat of a *yaksha* or a Buddhist or Jain stupa. A portion of a small tenon projects at one end of the stone. Although the site from which it comes is not recorded, at least 15 other parts of the same *vedika* are divided between various collections. The stone is carved in low relief; the upper border consists of a row of beads and pearls from which bells are suspended, alternating with buds. The frieze below is carved with mythical creatures such as leaping lions (at times with human faces) interspersed with fanciful palmettes composed of several vegetal motifs, including the lotus and honeysuckle.

The stone bears an inscription of historical importance on its reverse. Although fragmentary in this example, it was repeated several times at regular intervals on the railing. Preserved in its entirety on one example, it reads, 'Caused to be made by Kāśiputra Yaśaka, the confidant of king Sūryamitra, the son of Gopāli'.[1] Härtel has argued – on epigraphical grounds, as well as in response to the style of the carving – for the less well-documented of two kings named Suryamitra; he reigned in Panchala, northeast of Mathura, in the first half of the first century AD.[2] Kashiputra Yasaka held an important position in the court of King Suryamitra, who was second in the line of successors in the Mitra dynasty, after King Gomitra. The inscription thus provides evidence for the date and, less clearly, for the original location of the railing. The relatively small scale of the railing argues for an early date, as do the motifs of leaping creatures and palmettes on the frieze. These were widespread in India from the third century BC, and are executed here in a style quite compatible with an early first century BC date.[3]

The railing may have stood in Ahichhatra, the principal site in Panchala, from where sculptures in the same style and distinctive stone as that of Mathura have come and for which a sub-school of sculpture has been postulated. On the other hand, however, identically carved copings were excavated from the contemporary Kankali Tila site in Mathura. The two sites are not very far apart, and it would seem likely that the same set of itinerant craftsmen were employed at both. Since at least 15 other portions of this coping (*ushnisha*) are known, the railing to which it belonged perhaps enclosed an important space devoted to a *yaksha*, or a relic containing stupa, or even, perhaps, a tree-shrine.

Of the other nine inscribed portions so far known, only one, in a private collection in Kolkata, bears the full text. Two inscribed examples and eight others are in the National Museum, New Delhi;[4] one of the two in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is inscribed,[5] as is one in the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. The prancing animals all face the same direction, and they appear to have revolved clockwise on the outer face of the *vedika*.

91.2 COPING STONE FRAGMENT
Spotted red sandstone
Probably from the environs of Mathura
First century BC–first century AD
H. 16.5, L. 26 cm
EA1997.252

This fragment from a coping stone is carved with mythical animals. A crouching, boar-like animal with an unusually long tail tucked between his hind legs occupies the principal area of the relief, and traces of a prancing lion are seen following it. Both animals have strong faces with wide eyes and are carved in an energetic and stylised manner. Three leaves of a stylised floral pattern are present on the proper left side.

The top is bordered with a row of alternating bells and leaves or buds, a typical decorative motif of this period. The carving is in low relief. As animals such as those depicted here are commonly represented circumambulating a sacred shrine clockwise; it is likely that this frieze is from the inner face of a *vedika*.

91.2

1 H. Härtel, *Eine Mathura-Inschrift der vor–Kusana–Zeit*, Berlin: Museum für Indische Kunst, 1977, p. 193.

2 Härtel 1977, *op. cit.*

3 For other examples from Kaushambi, Bodhgaya and Mathura, see P. Chandra, *Stone Sculpture in the Allahabad Museum: A descriptive catalogue*, Poona: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1970, p. 59. For comparable pieces also see S. J. Czuma and R. Morris, *Kushan Sculpture: Images from Early India*, Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1985, p. 56 ; and Pal 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

4 S. P. Asthana, *Mathura Kala*: Catalogue of Mathura Sculptures in National Museum, ed. S. P. Gupta, New Delhi: National Museum, 1999, pp. 104–6, pls. 114–15 (although grouped with this set, on account of its slightly incomplete appearance, no. 115/6 may not come from the same *vedika*).

5 Pal 1986,, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 175–6, no. S53a–b.

92 Buddha's hand

First century AD
Probably from the Mathura region
Spotted red sandstone
L. 61 cm
EA1997.186

This colossal fragment of a right hand and forearm comes from an early sculpture of the Buddha that would have been more than twice life-size. The thumb, index finger and tips of the other fingers are missing. The soft, fleshy hand is in *abhaya mudra*. *Abhaya*, literally fearlessness, is the gesture of reassurance that conveys to the devout that they have nothing to fear with the Buddha's grace. A *dharmachakra* is carefully carved on the palm; it denotes the turning wheel of the Buddhist teaching and is one of the auspicious symbols (*mahapurusha lakshana*) that distinguish great beings.[1] With dharma inscribed now where the lines of destiny normally lie, fearlessness is the promise of the enlightened condition of Buddhahood.

The presence of the garland on the back of the hand suggests that it dates from the early Kushan period, when garlands were placed between the hand and the body of the Buddha. However, dating the fragment more precisely is difficult. The monumentality of the image and the garland at the back of the palm are in favour of a first century AD date, but the angle of the hand may suggest a later date. The *abhaya mudra* was shown with the wrist bent at an angle in the early pieces; by the reign of Huvishka in the second century AD these had tended to become frontal, held flat and straight. The angle on the Ashmolean hand is not very pronounced. In addition, the remains of a *sanghati*, the monastic robe worn by Buddha figures, can be seen just above the wrist. This may be of some importance as the right shoulder and arm of the early Kanishka period (and perhaps even pre-Kanishka) Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were left bare; it is more common to see a *sanghati* on this side towards the end of the first century AD. It is more likely, furthermore, to be the hand of a colossal Buddha rather than of a Bodhisattva: on the latter it is probable that traces of wristlets would have been found, as Bodhisattvas (other than Shakyamuni) are invariably bejewelled. This iconographic attribution is further corroborated by the prominent *dharmachakra*.

Colossal Buddha and Bodhisattva images were based on earlier monumental sculptures of the *yakshas*.[2] While the latter, serving as guardian deities, were placed on high platforms on the outskirts of villages, the renowned 'Bhikshu Bala's Bodhisattva'[3] colossus, the type of image from which this hand comes, was placed very much within a sacred site at Sarnath, where the main stupas and shrines would have been erected.

1 Comparable large images are known from Kaushambi, Sarnath and Maholi. A Bodhisattva Maitreya on a much smaller scale is in the National Museum, New Delhi (no. 59.530/1) and another larger Bodhisattva is in the same museum (no. A 40): Asthana 1999, *op. cit.*, pls. 82, 87.

2 As, for instance, the heavy and monumental Manibhadra *Yaksha*, found at Parkham village, 23 km south of Mathura, and now in the Government Museum, Mathura: this is one of the earliest known images of Mathura sculptural art.

3 For an early reference see D. R. Sahni, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*, Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1914, p. 36. The image is subsequently published in nearly every textbook on Indian sculpture. Remains of two large, life-size Mathura Bodhisattvas have also been found at Bhita and Kaushambi; these are now in the Allahabad Museum: see Chandra 1970, *op. cit.*, pls. xxxvi-xxxvii, cat. nos. 82, 85. Neither of these is of the same scale as the Friar Bala Bodhisattva, and the arm of the Ashmolean's piece must belong to a statue that was of a similar scale.

93 Palette or supporting dish

Second–fifth centuries AD
Gopalpur, Gorakhpur District, Uttar Pradesh
Sandstone
DIAM. 12.4 cm
EAOS.38 c

PUBLISHED: V. A. Smith and W. Hoey, 'Buddhist Sutras Inscribed on Bricks found at Gopalpur in Gorakhpur District', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1896, pp. 99–102.

Between 1854, when a hoard of Gupta gold coins was found at Gopalpur, and 1894, when Dr William Hoey and Vincent Smith were alerted to it, the site was seriously disturbed. This shallow dish was found in an eight foot square crypt or chamber composed of large bricks, 18 inches long and 3 inches thick. There must have been several objects interred in this relic chamber, from which four inscribed terracotta tablets were also recovered (cat. 121), along with another shallow dish of Kushan copper coins as well as a few even earlier coins of the Mitra kings of the first century BC. Since this object was originally published by Smith and Hoey as terracotta, it has always been believed to be so. However, it is in fact made of a dense sandstone with a high mica content.

The shallow curvature of the rounded centre of this curious dish perhaps formed a base or support for a relic-bearing container. The subject matter of the carving, on a register concentric to the lip of the dish, lends some credence to this view. It is divided into four segments, each featuring a stylised animal or humanoid rendered in a curvilinear style. One contains a deer, the second an unidentifiable animal (perhaps a horse or deer?) looking back over his shoulder, the third a lion and the last, most curious of all, has a squatting man; his bent left arm is raised higher than his shoulder and his hand is brought close to his face. The figure squats in a pose not unlike the many *yakshas* seen on Buddhist railings and in various post-Mauryan artefacts.

The lion, horse and deer are also familiar animals on Buddhist railings surrounding a stupa. They famously move in a clockwise direction on the abacus of the Mauryan column at Sarnath, which the devout at Gopalpur must no doubt have seen. The animals in this palette also move clockwise; each kneels (with erect hindquarters and outstretched forelimbs) while thrusting a foreleg towards the facing wall. The squatting *yaksha* also pushes the wall to his left with an outstretched arm. Perhaps a relic container in the centre of this 'palette' would thus have symbolically sat within the cyclical energies of the creatures.

The curvilinear outline of the animals and its excessive stylisation is also unusual, corresponding to no mainstream stylistic idiom of Early Historic India. However, a comparison with carvings on the few, more decorated stone relic caskets of a pre-Kushan or early Kushan date may yield some parallels.

94 *Nagaraja*

First–second centuries AD
Mathura
Red sandstone
H. 16.5 cm
EAOS.28
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

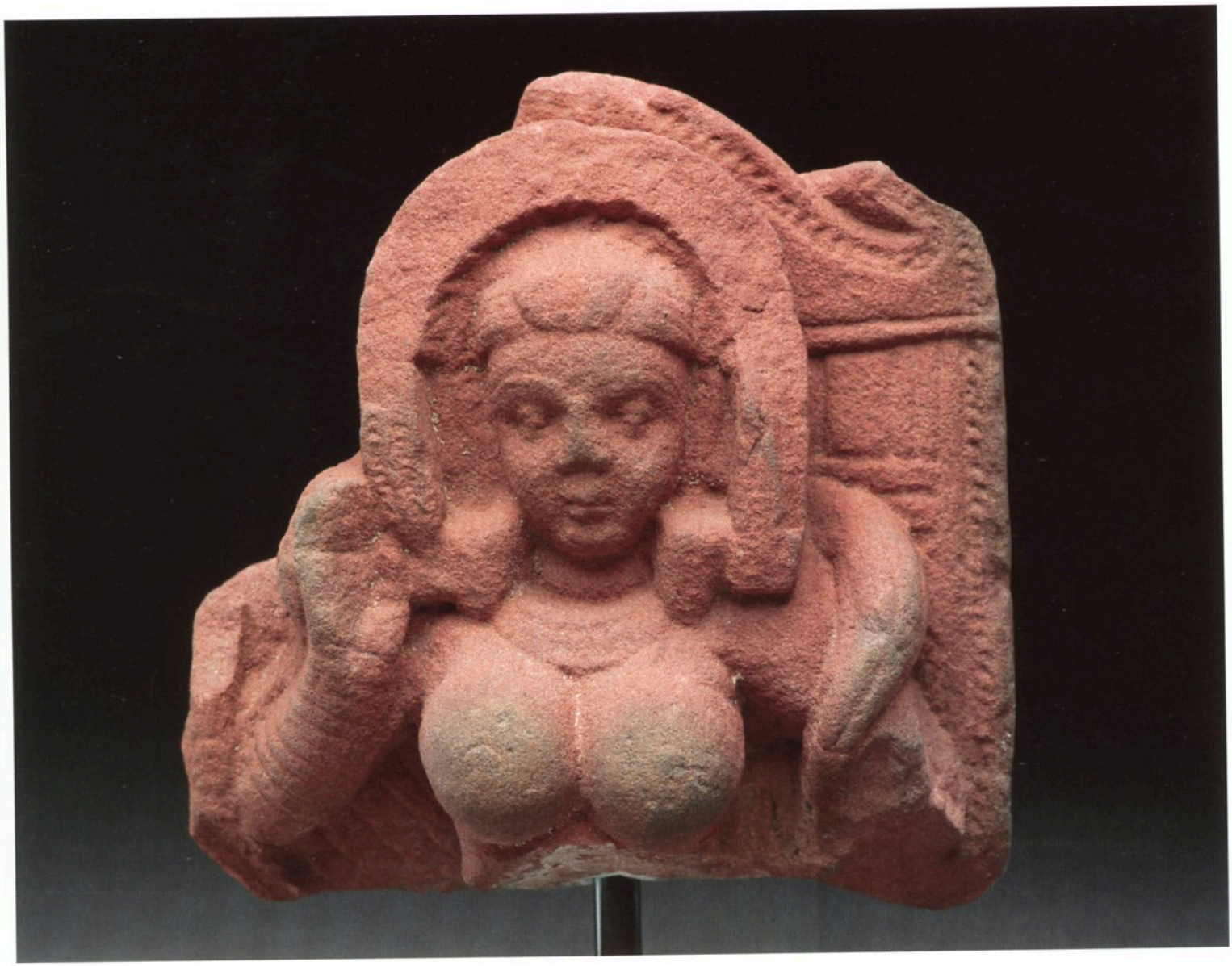
This small relief of a two-armed standing figure represents a *naga* or serpent, frequently personified and worshipped alongside other semi-divine beings such as *yakshas*, their kindred spirits. Like them *nagas* are personifications of nature, associated with eternity; they are feared (and hence revered) and continued to be upheld as keepers of the waters and the jewels of the earth, even when pantheons of other deities became dominant.

The sculpture is heavily worn, rendering individual features indistinct. Yet one can still make out the right hand in *abhaya* while the left hand, drawn to the hip, holds onto a small pot, usually taken to refer to *amrita*, the nectar of immortality or ambrosia. A large hood composed of five (or seven?) serpent heads rears over the *nagaraja's* head, which is surmounted by a turban or crown. The twisting body of the serpent is carved on the reverse. A rolled scarf is visible, falling off the proper left shoulder, and a broad belt holds up the dhoti. As usual the figure wears prominent earrings.

Several monumental images of *nagas* have been found in the Mathura area,[1] making it clear that these icons held a large following. These would explain why the *naga* was so readily incorporated into the emerging iconographic canons of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. *Nagas* were frequently placed near bodies of water (particularly dams) and under trees – and perhaps also as central images in temples devoted to them.

1 The most important include the Dadhikarna *Naga*: N. P. Joshi, *Iconography of Balarama*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1979, p. 18; one in the Brooklyn Museum: Czuma and Morris 1985, *op. cit.*, no. 25; and one at the Norton Simon Museum: P. Pal, *Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum, vol. 1: Art from the Indian Subcontinent*, Yale University Press, 2003, no. 44, pp. 80–1. The remains from the apsidal Temple 2 at Sonkh show that it would have been dedicated to the cult of the *Naga*, see Härtel 1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 425–7.

95 Two goddesses



Mathura
Red sandstone

95.1 GODDESS: FRAGMENT OF A STELE
Kushan period, first–second centuries AD
H. 13.3 cm
EAOS.34
Purchased from Dr C. L. Fabri with the help of the Max Müller Memorial Fund, 1941

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 11

The little fragment of a stele represents a goddess holding up her right hand in *abhaya mudra*. As her left hand is missing, along with the lower half of her body, it is not possible to identify her. She stands (or is enthroned) in a *Chaitya* arch, frequently employed in religious architecture from the third century BC onward. The goddess is thus literally emerging from her shrine (a feature that was to become conventional in later Hindu imagery on temples). Considering her hieratic pose, it is possible that this piece may have formed part of a longer coping stone atop a *vedika* that would have surrounded a religious shrine. Alternatively, it may have been part of a larger decorative tablet, such as a votive Jain tablet called an *ayagapatta*.

The goddess's face is a perfectly formed oval with a sweet expression; large eyes are set below arched eyebrows. Her hairstyle shows evidence of a central bouffant or *coque* commonly found in this period.[1] Various stylistic features indicate that this is an early Kushan piece. These include the slightly angular tilt of the right hand and the fact that it is not detached from the stele and rests on a cushion-like garland (which bears

typical diagonally striped cross-hatching), as well as her hairstyle and the generally low relief in which the sculpture is carved. Her large breasts are exposed. She wears a short necklace, large cubical earrings and multiple bracelets. A billowing scarf escapes from behind the arch and falls over her left arm.

95.2 A *MATRIKA* (LAKSHMI?)
Kushan period, *c.*second century AD
H. 24 cm
EAOS.27
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan of Mathura, 1939

The relief shows a two-armed female figure squatting; her right hand is held in *abhaya mudra*, the left holds a long stalk ending in a flower.[2] A small figure (perhaps a child?) can be found to her left and there is a trace, probably of a standing figure, to her right. The figure is heavily denuded and there are no visible traces of ornamentation or facial features. The head is surmounted by a drum-shaped chignon and the figure sits beneath a horseshoe-shaped arch.

Many different mother goddesses were worshipped by the various sub-sects of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains at the time. The trace of a small indistinct child, by the left leg of the figure, suggests this is a *matrika* or mother goddess.[3] Iconographically similar images in the collections of the National Museum, New Delhi and the Mathura Museum have been identified as the goddess Lakshmi.[4]

1 R. Morris, 'The Didargunj Yakshi and the "Coque au Bouffant Chevalier" Hairstyle: A Reassessment', *Archives of Asian Art*, XLII, 1989, pp. 77–8.
2 On account of this posture, the figure was once thought to be Surya.
3 For the popularity of *matrikas* and their connection with Skanda, see Cat. 47 and 57.
4 Asthana 1999, *op. cit.*, no. 36, p. 40, illustrates the National Museum piece no. 66.19 and refers to the Mathura Museum image, no. OOF 26.

96 Hariti

Second–third centuries AD
Mathura
Spotted red sandstone
H. 41.3 cm
EA1971.36
Purchased with the help of the Friends of the Ashmolean

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 13; John Guy ed., *L'Art de la Devoció: L'Escultura en els temples Indis*, Barcelona: Fondacio 'la Caixa', 2007, no. 7

Hariti ('the thief') was an ancient goddess from the realm of the *yakshis*. She had the power to afflict children with smallpox which could be fatal (hence her name), yet was also a popular *matrika* or mother goddess in both Kushan Mathura and Gandhara. The myth of Hariti derives principally from Buddhist sources, which present her initially as a terrifying figure who had to be propitiated with regular child sacrifice to keep her wrath at bay. To teach her a lesson, the Buddha hid one of her own children under his alms bowl. Hariti was grief-stricken, and the Buddha used this opportunity to cause her to sympathise with the anguish she had caused countless parents. She was thus converted to Buddhism, a faith within which she became a protectress of children.

In some depictions Hariti is accompanied by her consort Kubera or Panchika. She is usually shown seated, with children gambolling about her. In this relief, Hariti is supporting a child on her left knee and holding up a large cup with her right hand. She has a wide smiling face and her hair is dressed in a large central bouffant that is parted in the middle (see Cat. 95). She sits in a typical *chaitya*-arched shrine supported on columns with double capitals. With short flanges rising at the base of the arch, the ogee or *chaitya* arch here reveals a design scheme of an early *gavaksha* window, one of the most enduring Indian architectural motifs reproduced on Hindu and Jain temples in subsequent centuries. The goddess sits with her feet tucked into a cross-barred plinth through which her toes project.

A curious figure is seated between her legs. It is too abraded to identify positively, but it could be a child holding his right hand up to its mouth. Alternatively, as has been suggested previously, it may be an elephant-headed figure, perhaps Ganesha.[1]

If it is indeed a Ganesha, which is unlikely, this would open up an important discussion on the development of *matrika* iconography with regard to its links to Shaivism – a link between a divine mother and Ganesha would associate her with Uma or Parvati, which is not usually thought of as a pre-Gupta development. N. P. Joshi[2] noted that, apart from Skanda, Ganesha is also associated with the *matrikas* in the *Puranas*, however, as he rightly observes, that was a post-Kushan development. It has also been suggested the *matrikas* were derived from the *Krittikas* (the six mythical mothers of Skanda, thus explaining their iconographic link with him); later, as Skanda became associated with Shiva (Virabhadra), so were the *matrikas*. Further, in the early texts Skanda is known as a *graha* (or grasper / seizer), the terrifying adopted child of the *matrikas* – who were themselves stealers of children and foetuses, like Hariti.

Finally, we must also consider that not all elephant-headed images of this period refer to Ganesha. For example, in its complete form, a Chandraketugarh terracotta plaque in the Museum's collection (cat. 142) would have shown several elephant-headed figures together, none of them evidently pre-eminent as the singular Ganesha. In addition, Ganesha is also known to derive from personified *vighnas* (obstacles) and the *vinayakas*; these demonic types are associated with childhood disease and would thus have an appropriate link to the *matrikas*, with their similar associations. If this is indeed an elephant-headed figure, it may then perhaps be better identified as a *vinayaka*.

1 J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1987, p. 11.
2 N. P. Joshi, 'Matṛka figures in Kuṣāṇa sculptures at Mathura', in M. Yaldiz and W. Lobo, eds., *Investigating Indian Art: Proceedings of a Symposium on the Development of Early Buddhist and Hindu iconography, held at the Museum of Indian Art Berlin in May 1986*, Berlin: Museum für Indische Kunst, 1987.

97 Panchika and Hariti, or Kubera and Lakshmi

Kushan period, second–third centuries AD
Mathura
Red sandstone
H. 15, W. 21.5 cm
EAOS.32
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan of Mathura in 1939

This iconographic combination of a *matrika* and her consort, most probably referring to either Hariti with Panchika or Lakshmi with Kubera, is frequently found in the Mathura region represented on small plaques such as this; a number of comparable examples may be seen in the National Museum, New Delhi, and the Mathura Museum.[1] The figures sit on their haunches beside one another. The male deity is characterised by a typically large belly. He holds an indistinct object in his right hand; in better preserved examples this is a wine flask or lotus. His left hand is drawn up against his belly. The female's left hand holds a lotus and her right hand is held up in *abhaya mudra*. She wears a dhoti, the worn central folds of which are seen to fall to the ground from her belly. The image is badly worn and the face of the female deity has been reattached.

1 Asthana 1999, *op. cit.*, nos. 55–8, pp. 51–3, and N. P. Joshi, *Mathura Sculptures: A Handbook to Appreciate Sculptures in the Archaeological Museum Mathura*, Mathura: Archaeological Museum, 1966, figs. 40, 69. For an excavated piece from Kaushambi, see G. R. Sharma, *Excavations at Kaushambi*, 1969, pl. XLIX (A), p. 76.

98 Two Durga images

Kushan period, second–third centuries AD
Mathura
Red sandstone

98.1 DURGA AS MAHISHASURAMARDINI
H. 25 cm
EAOS.37
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura 1939

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, 'On a Disputed Element in the Iconography of Early Mahishasurmardini Images', *Ars Orientalis* VII, 1970, pp. 147–53, fig. 1

98.2 DURGA AS MAHISHASURAMARDINI
H. 19 cm
EA2005.13

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, 'On a Disputed Element in the Iconography of Early Mahishasuramardini Images', *Ars Orientalis* VII, 1970, pp. 147–53, fig. 6[1]

The iconography of the popular Hindu image of Durga Mahishasuramardini seems to have developed by the Kshatrapa and Mitra periods at Mathura as a result of the synthesis of disparate goddess images. The earlier figures, dating from the close of the first century BC to the first century AD, tend to be two-armed, while six-armed figures such as these can be dated from the end of the second to the third century AD.[2]

Durga stands with her right hip thrust out, propping Mahisha, the buffalo demon, on her lifted left leg as her two lower arms reach down to break the animal's neck (the left pulling the neck up as she presses down on his back with the right). The attributes in her other four arms are worn and indistinguishable, but would probably have included a sword and shield, symbolic of her assertive, aggressive nature, and a wreath or garland in the upper arms to suggest defensive, protective qualities and refer to her victory. In some contemporaneous examples, the goddess's uppermost arms bear the sun and the moon, representing eternity and her cosmic nature.[3]

There was, for some years, controversy about what Durga holds in her uppermost arms. It is now widely acknowledged that this is a wreath or garland, which she is in the process of putting on herself. (As the ultimate victor, she alone is left to anoint herself.) This is an exceedingly important, epiphanous moment in the theological legitimacy of Durga as a supreme godhead. Whereas the *Devi Mahatmya*, a section of the *Markandeya Purana*, the most important ancient Sanskrit treatise on the cosmic supremacy of the Goddess,[4] exists in a form no older than the fifth century AD, the visual evidence from images like these reveals that these ideas were already current in the Kushan period.

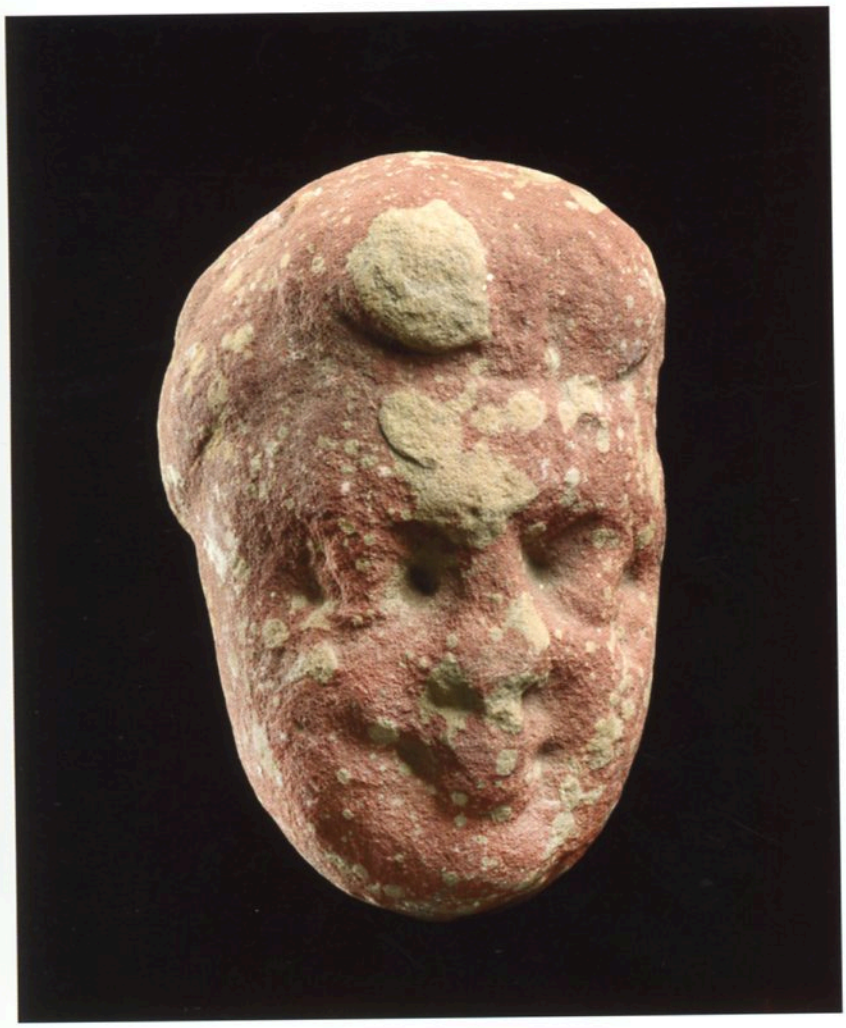
1 This sculpture was formerly in the collection of Dr Harle.

2 G. von Mitterwallner, 'The Kuṣāṇa Type of the Goddess Mahiṣāsuramardini as compared to the Gupta and Medieval Types', in *German Scholars on India, Contributions to Indian Studies*, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1976: vol. I, pp. 196–213. A more detailed discussion on the 'warrior goddess', with specific comparisons to other six-armed Kushan reliefs from Mathura, is in Doris Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes: Origin, Meaning and Form of Multiplicity in Indian Art*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 288–9.

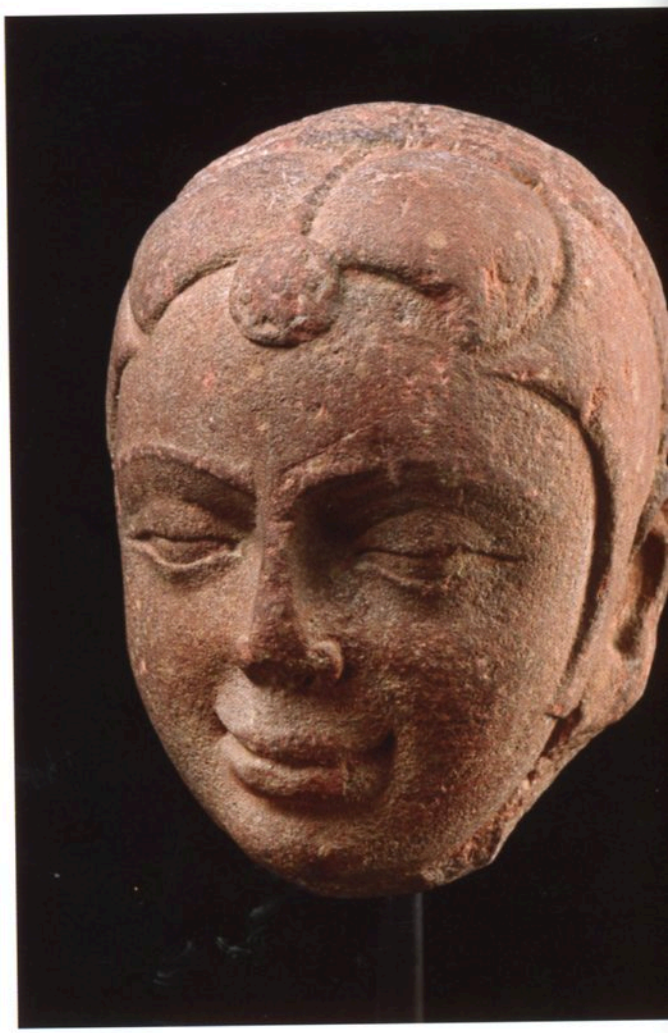
3 As in the example in the Los Angeles County Museum, see Pal 1986, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 195.

4 T. B. Coburn, *Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi Mahatmya and a Study of its Interpretation*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991; T. B. Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya, The Crystallisation of the Goddess Tradition*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002.

99 Two female heads



99.1



99.2

Mathura
Sandstone

99.1 FRAGMENT OF A HEAD (*YAKSHI*?)
*c.*Second century AD
H. 12 cm
EAOS.33

99.2 FRAGMENT OF A *YAKSHI* HEAD
c. Second–third centuries AD
H. 15 cm
EA1999.99[1]

Sculpture from Mathura of the Kushan period is celebrated for its depiction of sensuous female figures, variously known as *vriksha devatas*, *shalabhanjikas* and *yakshis*. These were conceived as comely nymphs, symbolic of fecundity and abundance, whose very touch would make trees blossom. They were frequently carved on the *vedika* surrounding a shrine structure to protect it with their auspicious influence. Such figures also possessed the ability to change their forms and were feared as malevolent sprites and ogresses. However, it was in their former benign manifestation that they surrounded stupas and other early shrines. It is likely that these two heads come from such figures.

1 Previously in the collection of Dr Herbert Härtel, Berlin.

100 Fragment of female figure

Kushan period, second–third centuries AD
Mathura
Red sandstone
H. 16.5 cm
EA1993.388

This fragment probably belongs to one of the smaller images of *yakshis* or similar beautiful attendant figures, taken from a larger frieze or tableau. It is carved in generally low relief, but invested with grace and movement. This figure steps forward with her left leg, while the gathered end of her dhoti sweeps across her legs to end draped over her left hand, which is held akimbo. She is broken below the knees and above the waist.

101 *Vahana* or mount of a *yakshi*

Kushan period, second century AD
Mathura region
Pink sandstone
H. 26.5, W. 31 cm max.
EA1996.76

The *vahanas* or mounts of the *yakshis* may be looked upon as their kindred spirits, for they are themselves an order of *yakshas* and come from the same semi-divine realm that lies between the world of mortals and that of the gods. Frequently misshapen and dwarfish, they create an important artistic dialectic between the beauty of the *yakshi* and their own grotesque forms.

This crouching dwarf has a large, monstrous head that rests on his clenched little fists, which he holds under his chin. His arms are disproportionately spindly, considering the size of his head and stocky torso. The remains of the foot of a *yakshi* rest on his head. This sculpture may be compared with several other examples.[1] It is the lower fifth portion of a larger block (probably a pillar from a *vedika* or stupa railing) which depicted a standing *yakshi*. The figure is broken at the hip and there is some damage to his upper lip. The stone is generally worn and flaked.

1 Cf. Czuma and Morris 1985, *op. cit.*, nos. 30, 32; R. C. Sharma, *The Splendour of Mathura Art and Museum*, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1993–4, pls. XX–XXI, fig. 48; S. P. Gupta, *Kushana sculptures from Sanghol*, New Delhi: National Museum, 1985, p. 7, nos. 1, 5, 8, 16, 18–20, 23–4; H. Mode, *Altindische Skulpturen aus Mathura*, Hanau: Müller and Kiepenheuer, 1986, figs. 12, 14, 17a, 22; P. Chandra 1985, *op. cit.*, no. 10; H. Härtel, *Some results of the excavations at Sonkh: A preliminary report*, Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1977 (reprinted from *German scholars on India*, vol. 2, 1976), fig. 46. Although all of the above show comparable figures, this piece is closer in style to the Sanghol ones.

102 Grimacing *yaksha*

Kushan period, second–third centuries AD
Mathura
Mottled pink sandstone
H. 24.5 cm
EA1994.95

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, 'Revisions and Previsions: Indian Sculpture, 1970–1995', in R. Allchin and B. Allchin, eds., *South Asian Archaeology 1995*, New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1997, vol. II, fig. 7, p. 610; John Guy ed., *L'Art de la Devoció: L'Escultura en els temples Indis*, Barcelona: Fondacio 'la Caixa', 2007, no. 21.

This extraordinary sculpture of a larger than life-size head of a grimacing *yaksha* is one of the most expressive works of the ancient period. His eyes are set below a deeply furrowed, frowning brow and pointedly gaze upward. The cheeks are wrinkled, with the nostrils pulled up and the lips turned down at the corners. His scowl is a flinch as much as a baleful expression. His hair falls in tufts onto his forehead and two leaves appear to be tucked behind his ears.

Perhaps because he is a sort of caryatid or atlant, the *yaksha*'s expression is in response to the weight he has to bear.[1] The hairstyle and quality of carving compare well with another large caryatid that would have probably lifted a large bowl, now in the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi.[2] The facial expressions of the dwarf caryatids are at times shared with the giant *yakshas*. A rare terracotta relief from Kaushambi shows a giant with a similar expression abducting a young damsel.[3]

1 More benign *yakshas* are commonly found as caryatids, for example one in the Mathura Museum: G. von Mitterwallner, 'Yakṣas of ancient Mathura', D. M. Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, pl. 35, xii.

2 National Museum (no 78.522), found at Ahichhatra, the [Patravahaka] *yaksha* is sometimes also confused with Kubera because of his perfectly formed pot-belly: see Asthana 1999, *op. cit.*, no. 53.

3 Two impressions of the moulded terracotta plaque are known, and the complete one, in the collection of the Allahabad Museum, is poorly illustrated: Kala 1980, *op. cit.*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, fig. 145.

103 Double-sided relief with fantastic beasts

Kushan, second century AD
Mathura
Mottled pink sandstone
H. 11 cm
EA1997.182

This irregular fragment has a grotesque head on each side. There are traces of roundels on each side within which these strange human faces are depicted; one has a lolling tongue and an upturned fang or tusk, the other an elephant-like face with an incongruous human nose. The piece bears some surface damage.

Considering the subject matter and the fact that it is meant to be viewed from both sides, this fragment could belong to a corner or terminal element (either a coping stone or a pillar with roundels) of a *vedika* railing surrounding a shrine or a stupa. While longer narratives and mythical tales tended to be illustrated along the railings themselves, fanciful beasts were potent talismans to protect spaces. They were thus often placed at thresholds, entrances and corners, or set outside a building, to ward off any evil that might threaten the divine spirit contained within the shrine.

104 Three images of Surya

Mathura
Red sandstone

The principal iconography – as we know it – of Surya, the solar god – a male deity carrying a full-blown lotus blossom in each hand, riding a chariot with horses, crowned and wearing boots and armour – was certainly fixed by the end of the Kushan period. However, this iconography took at least two centuries to develop. Various strains of solar deities from the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia and the Hellenistic world were synthesised to create the icon generally recognised as Surya.

There are four early Surya images in the Ashmolean Museum. No image has all the iconographic attributes present in later images, but sufficient attributes are present to identify them as Suryas. All are Kushan: three are from Mathura and catalogued here, while one is from Gandhara.[1] Taken together, the group exhibits all the main variations for the early iconography of the god. By the first century BC several images of a Surya-like deity can be found in India.[2] Apart from numerous examples in stone, various pieces in wood, ivory and terracotta are noted from Eastern India and images of the Greek solar god Helios are also recorded on Bactrian coins of approximately 140 BC.[3]

By the Kushan period there were thus several widespread prototypes for Surya images. The influence of the solar worship of the Indo-Iranians, linked to their idea of divine kingship, certainly aided the popularity of Surya imagery. The Kushan dynastic shrine at Surkh Kotal has an ornamental merlon with a seated image of a sun god who looks like a Kushan king.[4] Surya is often portrayed squatting on his haunches: this posture and his Central Asian dress are both also linked to Kushan royal portraits. These disparate influences are apparent in this group, the individual details of which are recorded below.

104.1 SURYA
*c.*First century AD
H. 15.7 cm
EAOS.30
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan from Mathura, 1939

This stele of mottled red sandstone portrays a male, squatting on his haunches, with what appears to be a club in his right hand and a sword (dagger?) in the left. Locks of hair radiate from his head, some falling on both shoulders, and there are traces of a halo behind his head. The sculpture is very worn and it is almost impossible to make out whether he is in fact wearing the boots that are characteristic of Surya. Very close examination also reveals that the figure would probably be wearing a cuirass. The sword and club are not normally associated with Surya, but this should be viewed as one of the anomalies of this inchoate formative period. This posture and costume are also seen in Kushan royal portraiture. The figure compares well with a few others from the same period and region.[5]

104.2 SURYA
Kushan period, second–fourth centuries AD
H. 14 cm
EAOS.31
Purchased with the help of the Max Müller Memorial Fund

This sculpture of buff to red sandstone is closer to the recognisable image of Surya. He is seen here squatting, riding a chariot and wearing armour. Traces of the seams of his boots can be seen on his legs and the two damaged and indistinct objects in his hands resemble stalks of lotuses. The rearing horses are pulling in opposite directions. Although not immediately visible, six well-carved horses seen in profile draw Surya's chariot.

The piece can be compared with a jewelled hair ornament on a female head in the Lucknow Museum (no. 46.80) and with several Bengali ivory and terracotta depictions, as well as one from the Sat Samudri Well in Mathura,[6] which has a trace of wings. Surya's association with wings has been noted by Banerjea as being characteristic of Suparna Garutman, i.e. the Vedic description of Surya as the 'golden bird'.[7] It is significant that in the Ashmolean's example he is now shown with the more generally recognised attribute of Surya, the horse-drawn chariot, and lotuses that are probably symbolic of the rising and setting sun.

104.3 SURYA OR A KUSHAN PRINCE
*c.*Third century AD
H. 23 cm
EA1972.45

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, Oxford, 1974, fig. 51; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1987, no. 20; P. Pal, *The Ideal Image*, New York, 1978, no. 5; D. Klimburg-Salter, *Buddha in Indien*, Vienna, 1995, no. 222; John Guy, ed., *L'Art de la Devoció: L'Escultura en els temples Indis*, Barcelona, 2007, no. 23.

The squatting figure holds a small bowl(?) topped by a lotus blossom in his right hand; in his left he probably held a sword, of which only the scabbard base remains. The figure wears northern dress (called *udīcya veṣa* in the *Bṛihatsaṃhita* of Varahamihira, LVIII.46[8]), a Scythian crown or cap and a cross-hatched breast-plate; he is also adorned with various ornaments. The knees of the figure are damaged and his left hand is missing. Lions can be seen in profile on either edge of the stele. The image compares closely with one in the Mathura Museum.[9]

Determining whether this image is of Surya or a Kushan prince, or of a Kushan prince as Surya, is not easy. While the costume is entirely northern, of Scythian derivation, and anticipates the canonical prescription for Surya, the cup, sword and lions fulfil none of these criteria. The posture and costume are appropriate for both a royal figure and Surya. The lions represent the terminal elements of his low throne, or a *simhasana*, which is princely, whereas Surya might have been shown on a chariot. Equally, the colossal Kushan image still worshipped at Gokarneshvara shows a haloed figure on a throne.[10] The symmetrically incised lines drawn from his lips to his

104.1

104.2

ears may refer to a faceguard or, more probably, a beard. Neither of these are associated with Surya and both are more characteristic of warriors, lending weight to the idea that this is a royal image. Having said that, it has already been noted that the early images of Surya were consciously made to conflate with royal portraits, which may explain the appearance of this figure.

Stylistically too, the image is hybrid – Kushan but veering towards a Gupta style.[11] Although the figure is mostly in northern dress, his lower garment resembles an Indian dhoti. That, along with the large eyes and discernible pout to the lips, as well as the ornament, certainly lend it an early Gupta period feel. Whatever the iconography may actually represent, it is undoubtedly inspired by Kushan regalia, and the softness of its facial features compares well with that in other late Kushan examples.[12]

1 A schist turban crest ornament depicting Surya in his chariot, no. EA1997.26: D. Jongeward, *Buddhist Art of Gandhara in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum (forthcoming), no. 88.

2 Prominent early examples include: (1) a relief at Bodh Gaya (Bodh Gaya Archaeological Museum, no. 1367); (2) the tympanum of Cave 3, that is the Ananta Gumpha at Khandgiri Hill, Orissa; (3) a relief in Vihara 29 at Bhaja, Maharashtra; and (4) a clearly Kushan example from Jamalpur, Mathura, where a relief from the Huvishka Vihara shows Surya in the narrative of the Buddha's life (State Museum, Lucknow, no. B208).

3 Osmund Bopearachchi illustrates the coins of an Indo-Greek king called Plato, as well as the slightly earlier coins (probably) of Eucratides I in Bactria: see his *Monnaies gréco-bactriennes et indo-grecques: Catalogue raisonné*, Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1991, pp. 74, 220–1, 453, pl. 24.

4 See J. Rosenfield, *Dynastic Art of the Kushans*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1967 and New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1993, pp. 187–9, fig. 124.

5 Cf. the Surya figure in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (no. 21.1706): A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, vol. 1–2, 1923, pl. I, p. 46; Coomaraswamy considers the object in the left hand to be a staff. Another Surya is in the Mathura Museum (no. 12.269), from Kankali Tila; see J. Ph. Vogel, 'La Sculpture de Mathura', *Ars Asiatica*, XV, 1930, pl. XXXIII(b), where he holds a lotus in his right hand. See also Sharma 1993, *op. cit.*, col. pl. XIII.

6 The piece may be compared with a small Surya relief, Mathura Museum, no. D.46, in *ASI Bulletin* 1909–10, p. 75, pl. XXVIIIc; also J. Ph. Vogel 1930, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVIIIa, discusses an example with wheels, in which the figure of Surya is provided with wings.

7 J. N. Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd ed., Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1956, reprinted New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, p. 130; at p. 429 Banerjea also mentions a similar piece in the National Museum, Delhi, no. 72.130.

8 Panditbhushan V. Subrahmanya Shastri and Vidwan M. Ramkrishna Bhat trans., *Brihat Samhita of Varaha Mihira*, Bangalore: V.B. Soobbiah and Sons, 1946, p. 514 (and not in Chapter LVII.48, as cited by Ajay Mitra Shastri, *India as seen in the Bṛhatsaṁhitā of Varāhamihira*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969, p. 226).

9 Mathura Museum, no. 16.1215, illus. in Gail (cited n. 10 below), fig. 18.1.

10 Although identified as a royal portrait by Rosenfield 1967/1993, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–3, 148–9, it has been identified as Surya by A. Gail, 'Early Sūrya and the Gokarṇeśvara colossus at Mathurā', *South Asian Archaeology 1993*, A. Parpola and B. Koskikachio, eds., Helsinki, 1994, vol. 1, p. 215, fig. 18.2.

11 Previously published as Gupta by various authors, including Harle: see J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, p. 20.

12 See, for instance, the Jina head in the Ashmolean collection (cat. 106).

105 Vishnu as Vasudeva

Second century AD
Mathura
Mottled red sandstone
H. 11 cm
EAOS.38a
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 14

This upper portion of a small relief portrays a four-armed standing Vishnu who wears a high, cross-hatched *mukuta* (crown). His upper (rear) right hand holds the staff of a very long *gada* or mace. The lower right hand, now broken off, would have been in *abhaya*, while both the left hands and most of the body below his waist are missing. Although the figure is considerably worn, traces of a sacred thread over his left shoulder can still be seen. The scarf draped over his left arm may actually be a portion of his *vanamala*, the garland of wild flowers that is a standard iconographic feature of the deity,[1] and that can be identified more specifically as his early manifestation in the form of Vasudeva.[2]

The Vaishnavite doctrine, with its antecedents in the Bhagavata cult of the Pancha-viras,[3] has great antiquity at Mathura. This image comes from the period when this early cult was accommodated into the Brahmanic Vaishnava doctrine. Most of these early images, including this one, are small and meant for private household worship. Curiously, this deity has four arms, a feature rarely seen in such early depictions. Comparable images suggest it is safe to assume that he would have been standing in the *samapadasthanaka* pose with his left hands holding a *chakra* (wheel or discus) and a *shankha* (conch).

1 For comparable images, see Mathura Museum, no. 781: D. B. Diskolkar, 'Some Brahmanical Sculpture in the Mathura Museum', *Journal of the UP Historical Society*, V, 1, Jan. 1932, pl. I, fig. 3, pp. 18–57. An almost identical figure was excavated at Sonkh that is dateable to the mid-late second century AD: H. Härtel, *Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh*, in *German Scholars on India*, vol. 2, Bombay, 1976 (repr. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1977), p. 85. Also pieces in the National Museum, in Asthana 1999, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–15, in which she lists the following Mathura Museum four-armed Vishnus: nos. 15.912, 15.948, 28.1729, 15.933, 15.190; further examples in the National Museum include: nos. 58.11/9, 58.11/19 and 20, 66.23. Variations show an eight – or two-armed Vishnu with his mount Garuda in the more complex form of Chaturvyuha (Mathura Museum, no. 14.392–5). This is also the period in which several of the god's incarnations are given their first form, including Varaha, Narasimha, Balarama and perhaps even Hayagriva.

2 See D. M. Srinivasan, 'Vaisnava art and iconography at Mathura', in D. M. Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1989, pp. 383–92.

3 The ancient hero cult worshipped the five Vrishnis: Samkarshana / Balarama, Vasudeva-Krishna, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Ekanamsa.

106 Head of a Jina

Third–fourth centuries AD
Mathura
Red sandstone
H. 17.15 cm
EA1963.27
Gift of Mrs Isabella Cohn in memory of Dr William Cohn

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 12; D. Klimburg-Salter, *Buddha in Indien*, Vienna and Milan, 1995, no. 81

There are perhaps an equal number of remains from a Jain context from Mathura which, when viewed alongside the large number of mostly small household 'Hindu' images, terracottas and sculptures from royal shrines, leave one in no doubt about the area's prolific and extraordinary artistic achievements that served the needs of a multicultural and wealthy settlement. This head may be recognised as belonging to a Jina or a Jain tirthankara,[1] as it has no trace of either an *ushnisha* (cranial protuberance) or *urna* (dot on the forehead) which would identify it as a Buddha. The Jina has a heavy, raised, unbroken line indicating the eyebrows and large locks of hair curling anticlockwise; the eyes are wide and heavily lidded, and the full mouth breaks into a gentle smile. The nose and the ends of his long earlobes are broken off.

The softness of the Jina's features, together with his large eyes and full mouth, indicate that this is a late Kushan piece. It is already beginning to exhibit some of the stylistic traits associated with the Gupta period.[2]

1 Tirthankara, literally a 'ford-maker', leads his followers across the murky waters of this life to the shores of an Enlightened one through a life of non-violent action.

2 For an almost identical head, see L. A. Bachhofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, 2 vols., Paris and London: The Pegasus Press, 1929, fig. 90; see also P. Chandra 1970, *op. cit.*, pl. XLII, no. 94, p. 65 (Allahabad Museum, no. 80) and pl. XLI, no. 91.

107 Female head

Third century AD
Upper Ganga Valley
Terracotta
H. 4.4 cm
EA1958.12
Gift of E.M. Scratton

This small, worn head of a smiling female wearing a fillet on her head may be attributed to the end of the Kushan period on stylistic grounds. The widening of her eyes, spontaneity of expression and fuller face are typical of late Kushan period terracottas, which developed into elaborate clay modelling traditions exemplified on the grand Gupta terracotta temples. The provenance of the piece is unknown.

108 Two heads

Kushan period, second–fourth centuries AD
Kaushambi
Terracotta

108.1 HEAD
H. 10.8 cm
EA1967.56
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

108.2 FEMALE HEAD
H. 12.3 cm
EA1967.62
Transferred from the British Museum (collection of Col. D. Martin)

Modelled heads such as these are widely found from Kushan levels and from surface collections in the Ganga Valley. They are characterised by their distinctive facial features, which are modelled in high relief; sharply incised lines for the eyes and jewellery lend them an exuberant immediacy. They are meant to be fitted onto complete figurines and sometimes, as is evident in Cat. 108.2, the base of the neck is shaped into a tenon to fit into a separate torso.[1] These figures frequently represent different ethnic types, wearing varying types of jewellery and costume.

Further research into their technique of manufacture has shown that a roughly modelled clay core was covered with a more refined clay. This in turn was impressed with a mould that outlined basic facial features; these were then highlighted by incising and with further appliquéd additions.

1 Most excavated examples from Kaushambi are from Kushan to Gupta levels, see Sharma 1969, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–79. For examples from other sites, including Kaushambi, see Kala 1980, *op. cit.*, nos. 226, 228, 252, 258. For a wider selection from Khairadih, with reference to their dating and technique of manufacture, see V. Jayaswal, *Kushana Clay Art of the Ganga Plains*, New Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1991, pls. XX–XXIII, pp. 75–84.

109 Part of a toy cart

Kushan period, second–fourth centuries AD
North India, or Peshawar area
Terracotta
L. 20.5 cm
EA1967.69
Transferred from the British Museum (Col. D. Martin Collection)

This terracotta element would have formed part of the undercarriage of a small toy cart that would have been pulled by model oxen. Seven holes have been bored through its sides and holes made through its base. This type of cart is widely recorded in the northern parts of the subcontinent and in the Ganga Valley, from sites as far apart as Sar Dheri, Rangmahal and Kaushambi.[1]

1 Compare A.H. Dani, 'Shaikhan Dheri Excavations (1963–64)', *Ancient Pakistan*, II, 1965–6, pl. XLI (a).

110.1

110.2

110.3

110.4

110.12

110.13

110 Thirteen miscellaneous objects collected at Sunet

GROUP 1: GAME COUNTERS, SEALINGS AND / OR WEIGHTS
*c.*Second–fourth centuries AD
Sunet, Ludhiana District, Punjab
Terracotta

110.1
Game counter, weight or sealing with three lines incised across top surface (illustrated)
L. 4.5 cm
EAX.144

110.2
Game counter, weight or sealing with three bars incised on top surface (illustrated)
3.5 cm square approx.
EAX.147c

110.3
Game counter, weight or sealing with inscribed lines and dots on surface (illustrated)
4 cm square
EAX.147a

110.4
Game counter, sealing or weight with inscribed lines and dots on surface (illustrated)
3.5 cm square approx.
EAX.147b

110.5
Terracotta sealing with slight impress of standing figure, poor condition (not illustrated)
H. 2.6, W. 3.9 cm
EAX.140a

110.6
Terracotta sealing with slight impress of standing figure, poor impression (not illustrated)
Coin impression?
2.2 cm square
EAX.140b

110.7
Clay sealing with lion impression (not illustrated)
3 cm square approx.
EAX.149

110.8
Clay sealing with inscription (not illustrated)
W. 2.8 cm
EAX.150

110.9
Clay sealing with inscription (not illustrated)
W. 2.5 cm
EAX.151

110.10
Clay sealing with inscription (not illustrated)
W. 2.2 cm
EAX.152

110.11
Clay sealing (not illustrated)
W. 3 cm
EAX.153

GROUP 2: BEAD AND COIN

110.12
Lapis bead (illustrated)
W. 0.5 cm
EAX.141b

110.13
Copper coin from the reign of Gondophares I (illustrated)
Diam. 1.2 cm
EAX.141a

The Indo–Gangetic Divide is located between India's two great river systems, the Indus on the west and the Yamuna on the east. The Shivalik Hills form its northern boundary, the dried-up course of the Ghaggar in the Rajasthan desert defines it in the south and the Aravalli ridge, reaching up to Delhi, marks its southeastern limits. The Indo–Gangetic Divide is a fascinating area that is both spatially and culturally in transition between the better known centres of Mathura and Taxila on its extremities. Archaeological excavations in the region have been few, however, perhaps because it remains a densely populated, cultivated area.

The large mound at Sunet[1] was excavated to reveal various small artefacts that are dated to the Early Historic period, and more specifically to the pre-Kushan period. The site is part of a wider network of contemporaneous settlements in the Indo–Gangetic Divide (encompassing Haryana and Panjab), including Agroha,[2] Naurangabad,[3] Sanghel,[4] Sanghol,[5] Sugh[6] and Ropar. These have revealed other interesting artefacts, ranging from at least the fourth century BC to the third century AD (although some sites have a longer period of habitation). Of these, the sequence at Ropar has often been taken as representative of the Early Historic cultural picture in the Indo–Gangetic divide. It remains the best known site in the region, and the most extensively excavated. Ropar has revealed a large number of objects that form a valuable and reasonably securely dated reference against which we can better understand material from the rest of the region, including Sunet.

A large number of comparable small clay squares such as the ones illustrated here – of standardised sizes, marked with short straight lines and, rarely, featuring 'U'-shaped parallel lines – have also been found at Rangmahal, Rajasthan,[7] and at Bhita, near Allahabad.[8] Most references to the objects are as weights or sealings, but they are not sufficiently refined to be the latter. Although they may have been used to weigh something down, their inconsistent forms and weight mean that these could not have been a part of any standardised system of weights. It is thus worth speculating whether they might not be gaming counters of some kind.

Various small inscribed sealings are also found at the site. They are in poor condition with indistinct legends, mostly in Brahmi and occasionally in Kharoshthi; in all likelihood these bear personal names and appear to be in a fourth century AD script. The lone bead in the collection from this site is of lapis lazuli, undoubtedly imported from Afghanistan. The cast copper coin is in poor condition, but the surface of the obverse is sufficiently clear to show Athena wearing a helmet, holding a shield in her left hand and a thunderbolt in the right. On its perimeter is a brief Kharoshthi inscription. Were the reverse of the coin as well preserved, it would probably have borne a head and a Greek inscription. This is an imitation Indo–Greek coin, widely made – first under the Indo-Scythian king Rajavula and his Indo-Parthian near contemporary Gondophares, and then further imitated in various parts of North India. It can be dated to *c.*AD 40–50, and it is likely that it was issued in the Jammu area.[9]

111 Decorative roundels and brick fragments from Sunet

1 Also in Ludhiana District, Punjab. This is an Early Historic site, with a few early terracotta pieces that are stylistically consistent with others from the rest of the Divide: *ASI–AR* 14, pp. 65–7; B. Ch. Chhabra, in *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal* 8, Hoshiarpur, 1970, pp. 177–8.

2 Among the better known sites in the Divide, Agroha in Hissar District was excavated over a number of seasons. After the initial explorations by C. J. Rodgers in 1888–9 (*Report of the Punjab Circle of the ASI* 1888–9, pp. 41–3), the site was re-excavated by H. L. Srivastava in 1938–9 (H. L. Srivastava, *Excavation at Agroha, Punjab, Mem. ASI*, 61, 1952); also mentioned in *IAR* 1978–9: pp. 68–9, 1979–80: p. 31, 1980–1: pp. 15–16, it has shown a sequence back to the NBPW (Northern Black Polished Ware). As regards ancient historical material, Agroha has revealed a few brick structures of the late Kushan–Gupta period, various terracotta objects and a hoard of Indo–Greek and other coins. The legend 'Agodaka Agaca janapadasa' on the coins has established the identity of Agroha with ancient Agrodaka.

3 In Hissar District, Haryana, most finds from the Naurangabad site have been collected from the surface.

4 Sanghel, in Gurgaon District, Haryana, is a small PGW (Painted Grey Ware) and Early Historic site.

5 Sanghol, in Ludhiana District, Punjab, is famous for the Kushan Mathura red sandstone images that were found perfectly preserved here. Period IV has revealed some Shunga terracotta; *IAR* 1968–9, p. 25, 1969–70, p. 31, 1970–1, p. 30, 1971–2, p. 39.

6 S. Bhan, 'Report of Excavation at Sugh (1964–5)', *Journal of Haryana Studies*, IX, 1–2, Kurukshetra, 1977, pp. 1–49. Also *IAR* 1963–4, pp. 27–8, 1965–6, pp. 35–6.

7 H. Rydh, 'Rang Mahal: The Swedish archaeological mission to India 1952–54', *Acta Archaeologica Lundensia* 40, no. 3, Lund: CWK Gleerup Publishers, 1959, pl. 76 (nos. 10, 14–20), pp. 161–2.

8 J. Marshall, 'Excavations at Bhita', *ASI – Annual Report*, 1911–12, Calcutta, 1915, pl. XXVIII: 125 and p. 80.

9 R. Senior, *Catalogue of Indo-Scythian Coins*, vol. 2, Lancaster, PA: Classical Numismatic Group, 2000, p. 158, no. 222.

Second century AD
Sunet, Ludhiana District, Punjab
Terracotta

III.1 DECORATIVE ROUNDEL
Decorative double-sided roundel
Diam. 9.5 cm
EAX.143

III.2 DECORATIVE BRICK FRAGMENT
(not illustrated)
L. 4.5 cm
EAX.145

Although patterned terracotta objects such as this roundel (cat. III.1) have usually been thought of as scrapers or for scrubbing, they may also have been used as printing blocks.[1] Dating from the first century BC to the fourth century AD, they are widely found in North India (at Rang Mahal,[2] Sonkh,[3] Atranjikhera,[4] etc.) and occasionally in the north-west as well. Sunet lies on the route to Taxila. Finding these objects in Taxila should come as no surprise, as that site seems to have been a fundamental part of the general scheme of North Indian urban material culture between the second century BC and the first century AD, when it began to adopt and transform Hellenistic and Indo-Greek styles.

The patterns on these roundels have never been systematically collated and studied. They make a fascinating corpus for a study of ancient Indian decorative ornament. They can also be related to a few stone roundels and other, hollow, terracotta roundels formed by luting two round plaques together. The hollow roundels are usually called rattles. However, it might be more likely that many such small, circular, double-sided objects were framed and used as decorative plaques in the pilasters that surrounded model votive or domestic shrines, much as the larger stone roundels were used at stupas.

1 As suggested with similar excavated objects at Rang Mahal, Bikaner District, Rajasthan: see Rydh 1959, *op. cit.*, pl. 70, p. 161.
2 *Ibid.*
3 Härtel 1993, *op. cit.*, fig. 148, and its reverse, 148R. This piece shows a lion trampling over various small animals on the obverse, while the reverse carries a geometric pattern similar to our piece.
4 R. C. Gaur, *Excavations at Atranjikhera*, Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study, Aligarh Muslim University; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, pl. C1, p. 380, shows – instead of the more commonly recorded roundels – a double-sided square dated to Period IV (Phase B), as being 500–350 BC. This is earlier than the dates given to such objects from other sites.

112 Stylised figure

c. First–third centuries AD
Gangetic plains
Terracotta
H. 13 cm
EA1958.33
Gift of E. M. Scratton

This solid terracotta figure, with a prominent, beak-like nose and stump arms, has several very coarsely added coils and pellets that mark out its breasts, navel, necklace, eyes and hair ornaments. The figure's stylisation is not dissimilar from that of the many bird – and animal-headed anthropomorphs that must have had a cultic function of some sort. Since the comparable figurines are mostly Kushan, this piece may belong to the same period.[1]

1 A thermoluminescence test on 8 August 2005 by Oxford Authentication Ltd. determined that it was last fired between 1,200 and 2,000 years ago.

113 Head of Shiva

Early fifth century AD
Mathura
Red sandstone
H. 30.5 cm
EAOS.38
Purchased with the help of Mr and Mrs H. N. Spalding and the Art Fund, 1939

PUBLISHED: S. Kramrisch, 'Notes: A Siva head from Mathura', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, VI, June–Dec. 1938, pp. 200–2, pl. 44; R. C. Majumdar and A. D. Pusalker, eds., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol. 3, *The Classical Age*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1954, p. 524, fig. 38; J. C. Harle, 'The head of Siva from Mathura in the Ashmolean Museum: Is the moustache recut?', *Asian Review*, n.s., vol. 2, no. 1, April 1965, p. 38; J. C. Harle, *Gupta sculpture: Indian sculpture of the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries A.D.*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, p. 44, fig. 50; S. Kramrisch, *Manifestations of Siva* (exhib. cat.), Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1981, no. 14; G. Kreisel, *Die Siva-Bildwerke der Mathura-Kunst*, Stuttgart: Monographien zur Indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie, 5, 1986, figs. 90 a–c; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 24.

The large, forceful, heavy-lidded eyes of Shiva are here set beneath a deeply bowed brow in a round face. Together with fleshy cheeks and thick lips, and complemented by his cascading ringlets, they give the sculpture an impression of control and power. Furthermore, the sculptor shows a thorough knowledge of this iconography and its meaning, one of the great hallmarks of Gupta workmanship.

The head has attracted much scholarly attention.[1] It has been argued that it could have been a part of an *ekamukha-linga* (the primordial phallic symbol of Shiva with a face sculpted on its base), or it could have been a part of a full-scale figure. Nor is it certain whether the moustache was part of the original conception, as is the case with Shiva's Aghora (or fierce) emanations, or if it was converted into that at a later date.

Stella Kramrisch has given an evocative description of this sculpture:

> ...outstanding in the elemental power, controlled and concentrated, that informs its every plane and curve. Severe and serene meditation is conceived by half-open eyes, their gaze steadied by reverberating curves of lids and brows and the deep shadows between their intersecting planes. Correspondingly, the strands of hair that spread out like wings of a soaring bird clasp the vaulted forehead and frame the face... Abdicating all sensuality, the austere forehead and eyes are in command of the full-cheeked face. Compassion and detachment hover around the lips – now damaged and moustached. The third eye – symbolically the seat of the fire of destruction – extending across the entire height of the forehead, is here an essential part of Siva's physiognomy. The head is indwelt by Siva power; it is the god's true likeness.[2]

1 For a close comparison, in the Lucknow Museum (no. h2), see J. C. Harle, 'The head of Siva from Mathura in the Ashmolean Museum: Is the moustache recut?', *Asian Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, April 1965, pp. 37, 39.
2 S. Kramrisch, *Manifestations of Siva* (exhib. cat.), Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1981, p. 15.

114 Head of Shiva

Gupta period, fifth–sixth centuries AD
Possibly from Ahichhatra, Uttar Pradesh
Terracotta
H. 12.7 cm
EA2013.88
Bequest of Douglas and Mary Barrett

One of the finest known Gupta terracotta Shiva heads, this combines the iconographic gravitas of its stone counterparts with an animated, expressive quality for which terracotta art is best known. Shiva's large, angry eyes are open wide, with a downward gaze under dramatically arched eyebrows. Yet, without a crease, his brow bears no element of surprise. A prominent bulging third eye is marked on his wide, clean forehead. The ends of his unkempt hair escape from his topknot to fall furiously as cross-hatched ringlets asymmetrically around his face. His cheeks are fleshy and the lips thick.

It is likely that the face was once part of a larger relief and, judging by the angle of Shiva's powerful gaze, the lower part of the frieze might have shown one of the many Puranic myths in which the god demonstrated his elemental powers of destruction and creation.

115 Chandrashekhara Shiva

Gupta, fifth century AD
Site unrecorded, Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh
Sandstone
H. 5.1 cm
EA05.45

This small head of Shiva was almost certainly part of a larger relief. Even at this small scale, however, it exhibits characteristic features of the Gupta style. A rounded face is set with large eyes, prominently arched eyebrows and a protruding lower lip. Shiva's locks are loosely drawn back, symmetrically covering his ears.

The small crescent moon tucked into his hair on the right side identifies him as Chandrashekhara, a form which would qualify him as a *saumya* (serene) or *shanta* (peaceful) image.

In most early depictions of this form, the god is shown with his consort Uma or Parvati. Certainly the sculpture is possessed by a tranquillity revealed through a gentleness in his eyes, in contrast to the other two Gupta images of Shiva in the collection (cats. 113–14).

116 Head of a woman

c. Sixth century AD
Mathura
Red sandstone
H. 15.9 cm
EA1961.138
Gift of Penelope Chetwode

This finely sculpted female head has probably come from a larger group. The oval face, with its almond-shaped eyes and fleshy lips, corresponds well with mature Gupta sculpture; yet the hairstyle, a large bouffant held in place by a jewelled band, and right earring are perhaps indicative of a later phase of Gupta, or even immediately post-Gupta, art.

117 Vishnu

Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh
Gupta, mid-fifth century AD
Pink sandstone
H. 52 cm
EA1996.77
Purchased with the help of the MLA / V&A Fund, the Art Fund and the Friends of the Ashmolean

PUBLISHED: *National Art Collections Fund 1996 Review*, p. 143; John Guy ed., *L'Art de la Devoció: L'Escultura en els temples Indis*, Barcelona: Fondacio 'la Caixa', 2007, no. 33

A transformation in what we now regard as the religion of Vishnu had taken place by the Kushan period. What were previously the various heroic aspects of the cult of the Vrishnis associated with Bhagavatism were now given a cosmic and psychological dimension.[1] This was achieved by merging them with the idea of *vyuha* or emanations of Vishnu (as opposed to his avatars, literally complete 'descents' in animal or human forms). Both the *vyuha* and *avatara* aspects of Vishnu, as that inherent, uncreated, timeless quality, found expression in varied iconographic forms, of which the principal Gupta temples at Udaygiri, Eran and Deogarh are important examples. There is reason to believe that the worship of Vishnu at these royal temples was linked to the concept of divine kingship, and the Gupta kings who were Vaishnavas often employed religious iconographic conventions of this sect to mark their authority.[2]

The iconography of Vishnu has been used several times in Indian and Southeast Asian art to such political ends. However, the Gupta period offers us its first clear articulation. This particular statue of Vishnu has not only ancient Indian iconographic conventions for the divine king, but also additional regal features that bear similarities with the divine king in Sassanian Iran. This is particularly visible in the mop of curly hair that can be seen emerging under the heavy kingly crown, in a manner widespread in contemporaneous imagery of Iranian royals.

Vishnu is shown here in his conventional form of a kingly figure, four-armed and with long curling hair. He wears a high, triple-pointed *mukuta* or crown; heavy *kundalas* or earrings pull at his distended earlobes and a necklace rests on his proud chest. A *vanamala* or garland of wild flowers, swathed around his upper arms, would have continued down to his knees. A dhoti or lower garment tied at the waist is rendered to show a softness as it smoothly clings to his body. A halo, plain but for its scalloped edge, in keeping with early to mid-fifth-century images, emerges behind the god's shoulders. Although his oval face is worn, one can still make out that it is set with large downcast eyes over a full mouth. lending the image an air of composure. The deity's torso and shoulders are distinctly muscular, not with the exuberance of Gandhara but with an innate strength. The chest is inflated with *prana*, the life force of his breath, over a narrow and shapely stomach which, with its ever so soft distension of abdominal flesh, betrays a state of comfort and ease without detracting from his control and strength.

This sensitivity towards the meaning behind symbolic and iconographic formulae is entirely in keeping with Gupta artistic achievement. Even in a relatively small image as this, we therefore see a profound understanding of the god who stands for order and balance that ensures prosperous continuity of the cosmos, providing stability in the *samsaric* cycle of regeneration and destruction. Vishnu was, for this reason, a particularly appropriate royal god, and it was not uncommon from the Gupta period onwards for royal personages to be patrons of important Vaishnava temples. This explains the large number of Vaishnava temples and sculptures from the Gupta period.

The figure is broken at the thighs. His arms and nimbus are also broken, and the sculpture has suffered general wear and pitting. Of the god's four arms, the lower ones would have held his standard attributes of *gada* (mace) and *chakra* (discus), usually personified in the Gupta period into *Gadadevi* and *Chakrapurusha* who symbolise Vishnu's martial and temporal strengths. The upper arms usually hold a *shankha* (conch) and *padma* (lotus), which stand for his more subtle transcendent qualities, encompassing compassion and eternity.

This sculpture is likely to come from the Upper Gangetic Valley, in the environs of Mathura or Allahabad. The general air of athletic strength and ornamental detail seen in the style of his crown[3] are comparable with images from that region.[4]

1 For a better understanding of Bhagavatism and Vaishnavism, see R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śhaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965, and Banerjea 1956 (reprinted 1985), *op. cit.*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press.

2 For more on the concept of Vishnu and kingship, see J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969 (2nd ed.), pp. 164–6.

3 The crown is paralleled on a bodhisattva from Mathura, see J. G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, pl. 72.

4 For a fine Vishnu in the National Museum, New Delhi – in better condition and larger in scale, but of the same type – see J. C. Harle, *Gupta sculpture*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, pl. 49 (also colour illus. in G. Morley, *Indian Sculpture*, New Delhi: Roli Books, 2005, pp. 68–9). For a much denuded comparable Gupta Vishnu from Bhita, see P. Chandra 1970, *op. cit.*, p. 120, pl. L, and, for another from Shankargarh, Satna District, Madhya Pradesh, also of the mid-fifth century, see P. Chandra 1970, *op. cit.*, no. 208, pl. LXXI. The Vishnu from the National Museum, New Delhi, and from the Mathura Museum can be found in: M. C. Joshi, Marie-Claude Bianchini, John Dawson, et. al., *L'âge d'or de l'Inde classique: L'empire des Gupta* (exhib. cat.), Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2007, pp. 152–5.

118 *Makara*

Fifth century AD[1]
Mathura area
Terracotta plaque
H. 19.7, L. 41.5, D. 8.6 cm
EAI971.13

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture*, Oxford, 1974, fig. 148; P. Pal, *The Ideal Image*, New York, 1978, no. 33; G. Michell et al., *In the Image of Man*, London, 1982, no. 32; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford, 1987, no. 20

The spirited modelling of this *makara* is a wonderful example of the verve of Gupta terracotta art, which distinguishes it from the gravitas of contemporaneous stone carvings. A *makara* is a mythical aquatic creature, usually depicted with the snout of a gharial crocodile. It is a sophisticated ancient Indian symbol of the fertile rivers. Here the creature is modelled with freedom as he lunges in the waters, his paws and snout transgressing the margin marking the end of the brick. His open jaw exposes teeth, while an angry, spherical eye indicates his power. His fanciful rear portion is rendered as dramatically rippling curves of fins and vegetal scrolls.

The lateral cutting of vegetal scroll ornament – in which the artist played with the folding and curving of flat planes, rendering them almost three-dimensional – was a hallmark of Gupta workmanship in stone and terracotta (see Cat. 123). A number of fine images from terracotta temples of the period are in museums across India and the rest of the world, even though only a handful of the temples themselves survive. No doubt terracotta would have been the most popular medium of construction. The temples' niches, in the finest examples, were filled with large, nearly life-size sculptures of the principal deities. Surrounding them at the base of the temple, and above, were images and narratives of the divine and, more commonly, of the semi-divine worlds, such as this *makara*.

This plaque is said to come from a site 100–150 miles north of Mathura. It is most likely from Ahichhatra, where one of the most important Gupta terracotta temples was discovered.[2]

1 Although a thermoluminescence test on 23/3/71 by the AHA Lab., Oxford, indicated it was made in *c.*AD 250, we can usually account for about 150 years of error in the test, making an early fifth-century date plausible.

2 Compare plaques from Mathura and Newal, illustrated by A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey Report*, vol. XI, (covering Gangetic provinces from Badaon to Bihar in 1875–76 and 1877–78), and those in situ at Bhitargaon. An exceptional terracotta brick carved with a *makara* (perhaps slightly later than the Ashmolean piece) was donated by Cunningham to the British Museum (no. 1887.7–17.55). This piece may also be compared with one at the Brooklyn Museum (no. 69.127.1), which shares the same marginal decoration, scale and spirit of the *makara*, indicating they might both come from the same site: illus. in A. G. Poster, *From Indian Earth: 4000 years of Terracotta Art* (exhib. cat.), Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1986, no. 102, p. 164. A near parallel is illustrated in an exhibition catalogue of J. Eskenazi, *Sculture dell' India Classica*, Milan, 1983, no. 56.

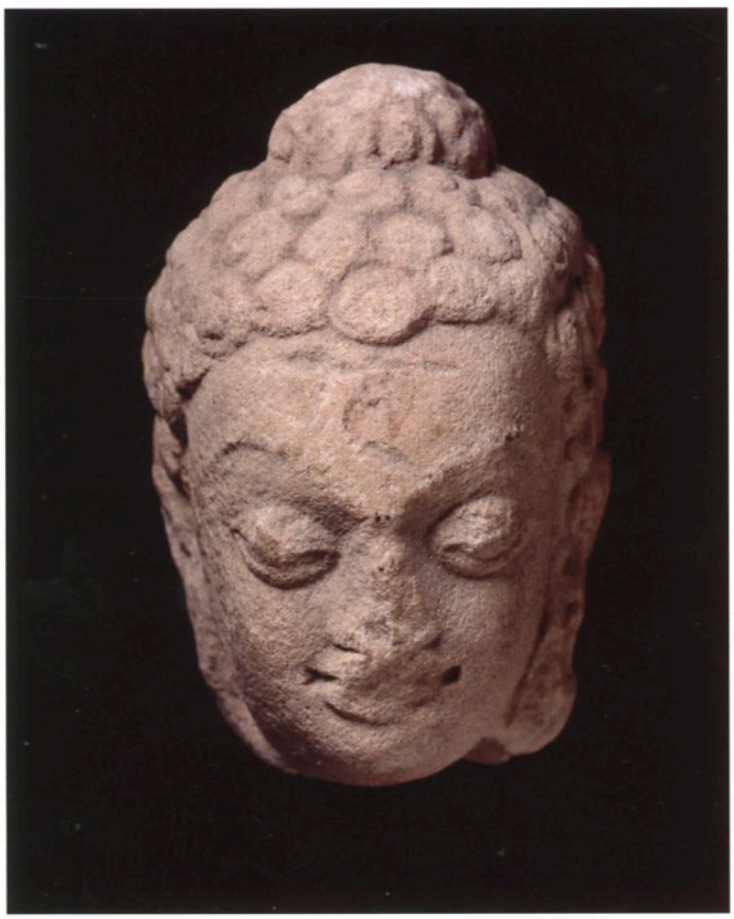
119 Buddha head

Fifth–sixth centuries AD
Sarnath
Pale buff Chunar sandstone
H. 6.5 cm
EA05.51
Purchased from Pandit Govind Charan, Mathura, 1939

Even a small head such as this, which must have been part of a much larger narrative scene, is informed by the artistic ideals of the Gupta period. The Buddha, with his perfectly oval face, has almond-shaped eyes and raised, arched eyebrows. A clean, broad forehead marked the space for an *urna*, topped with large snail-shell curls, and he has a full, sensuous mouth. The whole face possesses a quality of serenity, with the eyes half-closed in a meditative gaze. The piece has suffered some damage on the nose and lip.

This sculpture can be compared to a significant group of other examples unearthed at Sarnath and housed in the collection of the local site Museum and the Indian Museum, Calcutta.[1] The two major centres for Buddhist art in the early Gupta period were Mathura and Sarnath. The softness in modelling, the egg-shaped head, the upward slant of the eyes, the shape of the brow and the general air of tranquillity all suggest production in the Sarnath area. Further, the cream-coloured stone used most probably comes from Chunar, the celebrated ancient quarry about 30 miles from Sarnath.

1 See also the Sarnath Buddha heads published in P. Chandra 1985, *op. cit.*, p. 85, and B. N. Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1986, p. 256; also D. Klimburg Salter, *Buddha in Indien: Die Frühindische Skulptur von König Asoka bis zur Guptazeit*, Vienna and Milan, 1995, cats. 202, 207. A very similar head in cream sandstone is in the Cleveland Museum of Art, John Huntington Collection 1714–46.



120 Buddha

Gupta style, sixth century AD
Eastern Uttar Pradesh or Bihar
Bronze
H. 7.9 cm
EA2000.22

The Buddha stands in *abhanga* with his weight on his right leg, looking as if he is about to move. His *sanghati* covers only his left shoulder (which may be taken to indicate an earlier date), and its gathered end is held in his left hand. This Buddha has the plain diaphanous drapery, gentle movement and arched eyes typical of Eastern Indian workmanship of the late fifth and sixth centuries AD. His transparent, fold-less garment emphasises the contours of the body, a feature of the Sarnath school.

One of the greatest phases in Indian art was achieved between the fourth and sixth centuries AD under the rule of the Gupta and Vakataka kingdoms and their tributaries. The Gupta sculptural style is known to us mostly from images made of stone and terracotta – and, very rarely, from bronze figures. Portable images such as this were instrumental in helping to disseminate Buddhism and its iconography to Tibet, Southeast Asia and China, yet very few bronzes of the Buddha are known from this early period. Almost all known examples were found in Tibetan monasteries, to which they had been brought in antiquity. Monks from all over the Buddhist world frequently travelled to Sarnath and Bodh Gaya on pilgrimage. They were trained at large monastic towns such as Nalanda and returned to their home countries with portable images, mostly bronzes like this one, and terracottas. These images played a decisive role in shaping the artistic styles of those countries, where they were copied.

The posture of the figure may be compared with that of the renowned standing sandstone image from Sarnath in the Indian Museum, Calcutta (Kolkata). The closest comparable image in bronze is in the collection of the Norton Simon Museum, Los Angeles, although this has a much less perceptible sway to the hip.[1] However, the above-mentioned images are

appreciably larger than this piece. The style of having only one shoulder covered by the *sanghati* is more common in either the earlier Kushan period stone images from Mathura or in the bronzes of such southern Gupta sites as Buddhapad (Andhra Pradesh) in the Deccan[2] and, rarely, at the Vakataka site of Phopnar.[3] However, this bronze certainly does not possess the unique metal composition or style of the Phopnar pieces, nor is it as rigid as the Buddhapad ones. It is in all other ways stylistically similar to an Eastern Indian idiom.

By the Gupta period the iconography of the Buddha with which we are familiar had been formalised. All the individual elements were then in place: the broad forehead marked by an *urna*, the snail-shell curls covering the *ushnisha*, which symbolises his great wisdom, the breadth of his shoulders conveying the Buddha's great strength and the standard gesture of *abhaya mudra*, here broken, made by his left hand to reassure his followers that they have nothing to fear. Other iconographic norms that were standardised for the Buddha in this period include the eyebrows, arched like birds in flight, the heavy eyelids, suggesting his meditative gaze, and his distended, undecorated ear lobes, stretched from the weight of the earrings he wore when still Prince Siddhartha.

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1 For the Sarnath stone Buddha, Indian Museum no. 9515/A22895, see Klimburg-Salter 1995, *op. cit.*, no. 205, p. 221, and, for the more famous piece in the same collection, no. A 25102 (S 90), see Williams 1982, *op. cit.*, no. 87. For the bronze in the Norton Simon Museum, Los Angeles (no. F. 1972.1.S), see Pal 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 106, no. 69, and Ulrich von Schroeder, *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications, 1981, no. 43C. For the other famous eastern Indian bronze in the Rockefeller collection, see N. P. Ahuja, *Divine Presence: Arts of India and the Himalayas* (exhib. cat.), Milan: Five Continents Editions, 2003, p. 66, no. 9; the sculpture was previously published in Denise P. Leidy, *Treasures of Asian Art: The Asia Society's Mr and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection*, New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1994, p. 28, with further references.

2 von Schroeder 1981, *op. cit.*, no. 44A, B, C and G, which are attributed by him to the sixth century AD under the patronage of the early Pallavas of the Deccan.

3 von Schroeder 1981, *op. cit.*, no. 44D and H.

121 Four inscribed tablets

121.1 obverse and reverse

Sixth century AD
Gopalpur, Gorakhpur District, Uttar Pradesh
Terracotta
Gift of Mrs Hoernle, *c.*1923

121.1 TABLET 1
L. 20.5 (max.), W. 13.4 cm
EAX.402a
L. 8.6, W. 7.3 cm
EAX.402b
Broken into four parts, three of which are restored and rejoined (EAX.402a), while one remains separated (EAX.402b); small fragments are missing
Inscribed in 12 lines on the obverse, 6 lines on the reverse

121.2 TABLET 2
L. 23.1, W. 11.5 cm
Inscribed in 12 lines on the obverse, 12 on the reverse
EAX.403

121.3 TABLET 3
L.29.5 cm, W. 12 cm
Inscribed in 12 lines on the obverse, 10 on the reverse
EAX.404

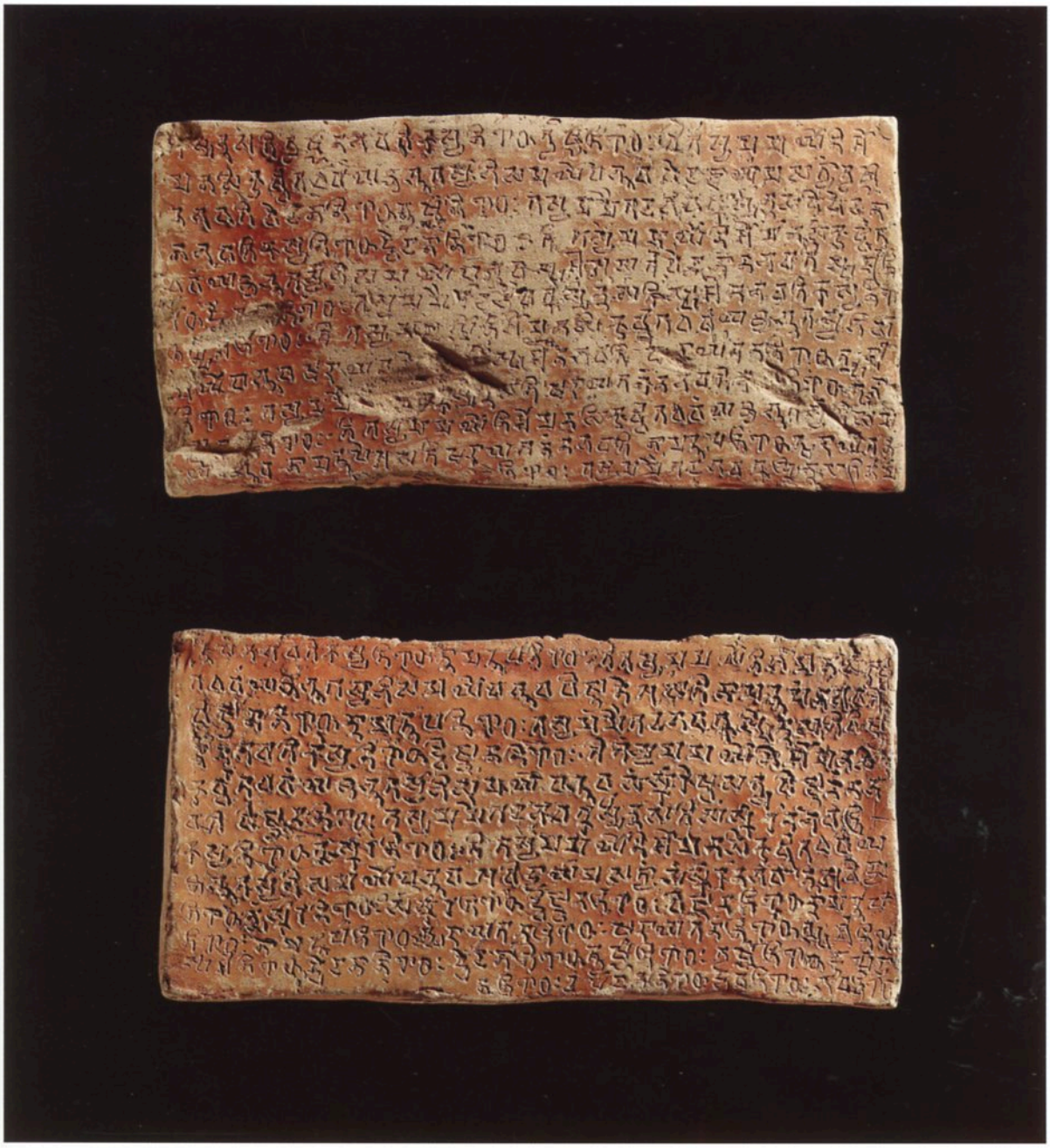
121.4 TABLET 4
L.24.3, W. 10.5 cm
Inscribed in 10 lines on the obverse, 9 on the reverse
EAX.405
This piece has a single break, which has been restored.

PUBLISHED: V. A. Smith and W. Hoey, 'Buddhist Sutras Inscribed on Bricks found at Gopalpur in Gorakhpur District', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1896, pp. 99–102, pl. vii; V. A. Smith, 'Deposit of Sutras in Stupas', *Indian Antiquary*, July 1904, pp. 175–6; T. W. Rhys-Davids, *Buddhist India*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903, p. 123, fig. 27; E. H. Johnston, 'The Gopalpur Bricks', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1938, pp. 547–53, pls. viii, ix-x; W. Zwalf, ed., *Buddhism: Art and Faith*, London: British Museum Publications, 1985, no. 34.

While 20 Gupta period gold coins (of which seven were of the emperor Chandragupta)[1] and a pot full of cowries were recorded from Gopalpur (28 miles south of Gorakhpur) in 1854, the first of the four tablets illustrated here only came to the attention of Vincent Smith and Dr William Hoey 40 years later. Smith, one of the most influential historians of Indian art and architecture, was subsequently alerted to a tablet that was available for sale by Pandit Ramgharib Chaube in 1894–5. A large number of bricks began to be recorded at Gopalpur when the local *zamindar* (landlord) instructed his staff to find old bricks, with which he intended to finish making his indigo vats. In January 1896 another tablet made its way to Dr Hoey. He then explored the site's two large mounds and found two further tablets, making a total of four (one of which is highly damaged).

The tablets came from a small (eight foot square) chamber built out of large bricks. On a ledge alongside was a small saucer with 11 copper coins, mostly dating from the first to second centuries AD. Ten were Kushan (Hima Kadphises [*sic*, now referred to as Vima Kadphises], Kanishka and Huvishka) and one Mitra (cock and bull type with the legend '*ayu mitrasa*'). Hoey and Smith presented their findings at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1896.[2]

The four tablets are not of the same size. They are each one inch thick, but their length and width vary. All are inscribed on both sides, and at least two different forms of handwriting can be discerned. One has larger letters with more spaces between them and is altogether more rapid in



121.2 obverse and reverse

execution, while the majority are in a more careful, smaller and tighter hand. EAX.402 and 405 are damaged: the latter has a single break suffered accidentally in the 1890s, while EAX.402 was found in four parts. Three of the parts fit together, but the fourth does not at first seem to fit neatly. A careful look shows that the handwriting differs in exactly the same ways on either side of the fragment and the tablet; they both have the same consistency in the lines and both pieces were exposed to an identically reducing atmosphere in the kiln, creating several charcoal grey patches (not visible in any of the other tablets). These features indicate that the loose piece does indeed come from EAX.402. The fragment is an edge of the tablet, and there are obviously two missing segments of inscription on EAX.402.

While studying the palaeography, Johnston believed that as there was no burring (or gathering) of clay on the extremities of the strokes, it was unlikely that they had been incised on wet clay; he thus believed the tablets must have been carved after firing.[3] This is in fact incorrect. There are traces of burring on the edges of the letters. The tablets were probably allowed to become leather-hard before they were inscribed. In that consistency and state, clay at the extremities of strokes would form granules that would stick together and could be easily brushed off, or would fall away. Wet tablets would be difficult to inscribe on both sides without damaging the inscription on the already carved surface as the scribe wrote on its reverse. Pre-fired (bone dry) terracotta remains inscribable with a sharp iron or steel stylus, but one would expect a formal and rigid hand in that case (as with stone), rather than this more spontaneous, cursive set of inscriptions.

The French Sanskritist Jean Filliozat brought up the similarity of the script on these bricks with the Tibetan syllabary at a meeting of French Orientalists presided over by Paul Pelliot in 1939.[4] Some time

later the Japanese Tibetologist Inaba Shoju followed up this suggestion, observing that these inscriptions were so similar to the Tibetan script that he questioned the extent to which the seventh century AD grammarian Thönmi Sambhota could be credited with his traditionally received role of creator of the Tibetan script.[5] Stephen Beyer, in *The Classical Tibetan Language* in 1992,[6] takes a similar view.

Palaeographically, the tablets are in fact inscribed in what is certainly identifiable as Gupta period Brahmi. However, because they have conjoined letters below them they were said by some to be the earliest surviving prototypes of Tibetan. Very similar tablets were found at Nalanda.[7] Written on soft clay, the writing is again more informal in style than inscriptions chiselled on stone. That this genre of script influenced the formation of Tibetan cannot, however, be disputed. Indeed Gopalpur and Nalanda were some of the early monastic settlements which attracted Tibetan monks.

The presence of older coins interred in the crypt or relic chamber at Gopalpur is typical of a trend commonly found in ancient Buddhist relic deposits, as is the occurrence of the particular sutra found here.[8] Once the *sharirika dhatu* or corporeal relics of the Buddha were no longer available to be deposited in relic chambers, sacred texts epitomising the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings, were used.

Smith and Hoey presented the transcription of the first of the tablets in 1896. They concluded that the inscriptions were all related to the same sutra, i.e. the *Pratityasamutpada Sutra* or Sutra of Dependent Origination. E. H. Johnston reread them in 1938 in his article in the *JRAS*. He found some minor inconsistencies in the transcription of 'brick' 1 and offered his transcriptions of the other three, while agreeing with the view that it was indeed the Sutra of Dependent Origination. This has been the opinion of all scholars who have discussed these pieces since.

The notion of 'dependent origination' (*pratītya-samutpāda* in Sanskrit, *paticcasamuppāda* in Pali, *fajie yuanqi* in Chinese), also translated as 'interdependent origination' or 'conditioned coproduction', is a core concept of Buddhism. In early literature the Buddha's Awakening is seen as his complete insight into this causal chain of dependent arising. The teaching of the chain of the dependent origination, or the causal links that lead to suffering and the means for its cessation, began to be seen almost as one with magical potency. It is even said that a person who can see the meaning of dependent arising sees Dharma itself. Of the texts selected for burial in a stupa, therefore, those that best expressed the cyclical nature of existence and the most essential Buddhist doctrine were considered appropriate.[9] In its commonly received version as a chain of 12 links, it is summarised thus: [10]

With Avidyā (ignorance) as condition, Saṃskāra (mental formations) arise
With Saṃskāra (mental formations) as condition, Vijñāna (consciousness) arises
With Vijñāna (consciousness) as condition, Nāmarūpa (name and form) arise
With Nāmarūpa (name and form) as condition, Ṣaḍāyatana (the six sense spheres) arise
With Ṣaḍāyatana (the six sense spheres) as condition, Sparśa (contact) arises
With Sparśa (contact) as condition, Vedanā (feeling) arises
With Vedanā (feeling) as condition, Tṛṣṇā (craving) arises
With Tṛṣṇā (craving) as condition, Upādāna (clinging) arises
With Upādāna (clinging) as condition, Bhava (becoming) arises
With Bhava (becoming) as condition, Jāti (birth) arises
With Jāti (birth) as condition, Jarāmaraṇa (ageing and death) arise
And thus the Bhāva-chakra, or cycle of existence, continues.

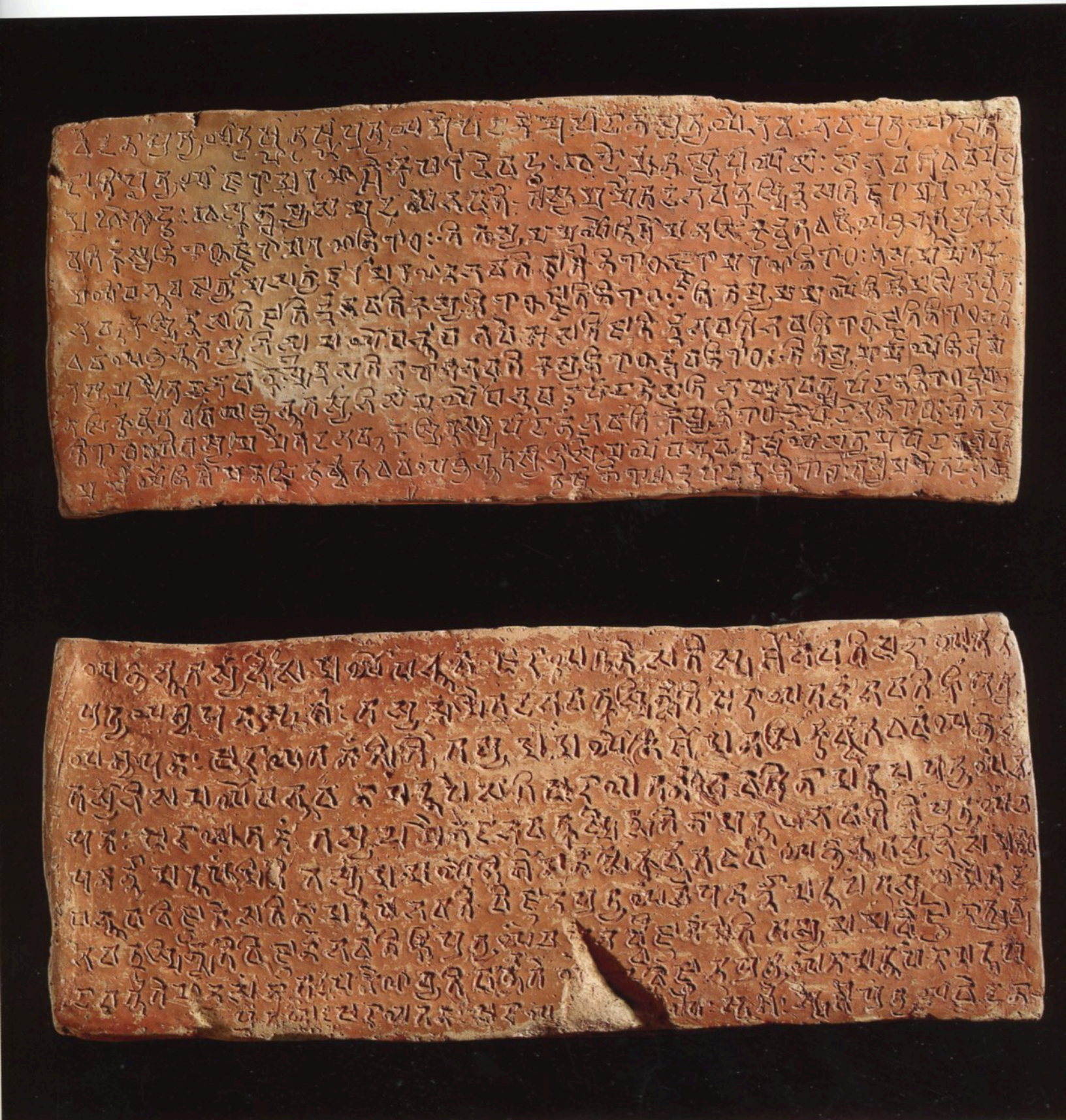
Mental as well as physical phenomena are believed to come into being only in relation to, and conditioned by, other phenomena. Nirvana is often conceived of as the stopping of this cycle. Suffering is based on certain causes: if the causes are removed, suffering will also disappear. By removing the causes for craving, craving ceases. So, with the ceasing of birth, death ceases. W the ceasing of becoming, birth ceases, an so on, until with the ceasing of ignorance karma is produced, and the whole proces of death and rebirth ceases. The constituents of this chain are variously found in different scriptures which later develop in a sutra by themselves. Perhaps the earlies reference to them would be at the beginni of Book 2 of the *Samyuttanikaya*.

Over the past 70 years there has been a large amount of scholarship on this sutra, its recensions and its importance to Buddhist metaphysics. Many of these arguments rest on the exact sequence of t clauses, or the order of the constituents o dependence.[11] The links are not always 12 in number, and their sequence is altered o a number of occasions. This points to the fact that they can be understood as a later standardisation of the teaching, attempti to give it a coherent and unified form. Als rather than seeking to understand the 12 stages of dependencies in the sutra as bei spread over an entire life, or over several lives, they may be seen as perpetually in existence, manifesting in everything with this world of *samsara*, the cycle of death an rebirth.

Tablets 1 and 4 have the same inscripti while 2 and 3 are elaborations on the Sutr 1 and 4 have the opening lines of the Sutra 'Thus have I heard – Once upon a time, Bhagavan was dwelling at Shravasti in the Jetavana, in the garden of Anathapindada etc.' A slightly corrected and amended full transcript of the inscriptions as noted by E. H. Johnston in 1938 follows. Words or letters that are not noted in previous read ings are given in bold.

TABLET I OBVERSE

1. evaṁ mayā **ṣrutam** ekasminna samaye bhagavān śrāvastyāṁ viharati jetavane[12]
2. nāthapiṇḍadasyārāme tatra bhagavānni.. **n**āmantrayati sma dharmaṇāṁ vo bhi
3...va ācāryaṁ ca de..yivyāṁ..pacayaṁ ca tachhṛṇuta [sādhacāsuṣvaca][13]
4. manasikuruta bhāviṣye dharmaṇāṁācayaḥ katamaḥ yadutāsm**in..ti**[14]
5. daṁ bhavatyasyotpādādidmutpadyate yadut



121.3 obverse and reverse

121.4 obverse

vidyāpratyayāḥ saṁskārāḥ saṁskāra
6. pratyayaṁ vijñānaṁ vijñānpratyayaṁ
nāmarūpaṁ nāmarūpapratyaya sparśaḥ[15]
7. sparśapratyayā [veda]nā vedanāpratyayā tṛṣṇā
tṛṣṇāpratyayamupādanamu-
8. pādānpratyayo bhavaḥ bhavapratyayā
jātirjātipratyayā jarāmaraṇā
9. śokaparidevaduḥkhādermanasyopāyāsāḥ[16]
saṁbhavatyevamansaya mahato

TABLET I REVERSE

1. duḥkhaskaṁdhasya samudāyo
bhavatyayamucyate dharmāṇāmācayaḥ dharmāṇā
2. mapacayaḥ katamaḥ yadutvā vidyānirodhat
saṁskārnirodhaḥ saṁskārnirodhā...
3. jñananirodhaḥ
vijñānanirodhānnāmarūpanirodhaḥ
nāmarūpanirodhātṣaḍāyatana
4. nirodhaḥ ṣaḍāyatananirodhādvedanānirodhaḥ
vedanānirodhātṛṣṇānirodhaḥ[17]
5. tṛṣṇānirodhādupādānanirodhaḥ
upādānanirodhād..vanirodhaḥbhavanirodhājjāti
6. nirodhaḥ jātinirodhājjarāmaraṇāśokaparideva
duḥkhādermanasyopāyāsā
7. nirudhyaṁtevamasya [kepama]sya[18] mahato
duḥkhaskaṁdasya nirodho bhavatyayamucyate
8. dharmāṇāmapcayaḥ dharmāṇāṁ vo bhi..va
ācayaṁ ca deśayiṣyāṁyapacayaṁ ca
9. iti me yaduktamidametatpratyaktamidamavo-
cabhdagavānāttamanasaste
10. .....bhikṣavo bhagavato bhāṣitamasya
nandaḥ[19]

TABLET II OBVERSE

1. yathābhutasyābhisamayo babhūva ṣaḍāyatane
sati sparśo bhavati ṣaḍāyatana –
2. pratyayaś ca puna sparśaḥ tasya mamaitad
abhavat kasmin sati ṣaḍāyatanaṁ bhavati
kiṁpratya-
3. yaś[20] ca punaḥ ṣaḍāyatanaṁm iti tasya mama
yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ yathābhū-
4. tasyābhisamayo babhūva nāmarūpe sati
ṣaḍāyatanaṁ bhavati nāmarūpapratyayaṁ ca
5. punaḥ ṣaḍāyatanaṁ tasya mamaitad abhavat
kasmin sati nāmarūpa[ṁ] bhavati kiṁpratyayaṁ
ca
6. punar nnāmarūpaṁm iti tasya
mama yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ
yathābhutasyābhisamayo
7. babhūva vijñāne sati nāmarūpaṁ bhavati
vijñānapratyayaṁ ca punar nnāmarūpam tasya
mamaitad a-
8. bhavat kasmin sati vijñānaṁbhavati kiṁpra-
tyayaṁ ca punar vvijñānaṁm iti tasya mama
vijñānāt pratya-
9. [yā]d āvarttate mānasaṁ nātaḥ pareṇa vyati-
varttate ya[duta] vijñānapratyayaṁ nāmarūpaṁ
nāmarūpa-
10. pratyayaḥ ṣaḍāyatanaḥ[21] ṣaḍāya[tanapratya]
yaḥ sparśaḥ sparśaḥpratyayā vedanā

TABLET II REVERSE

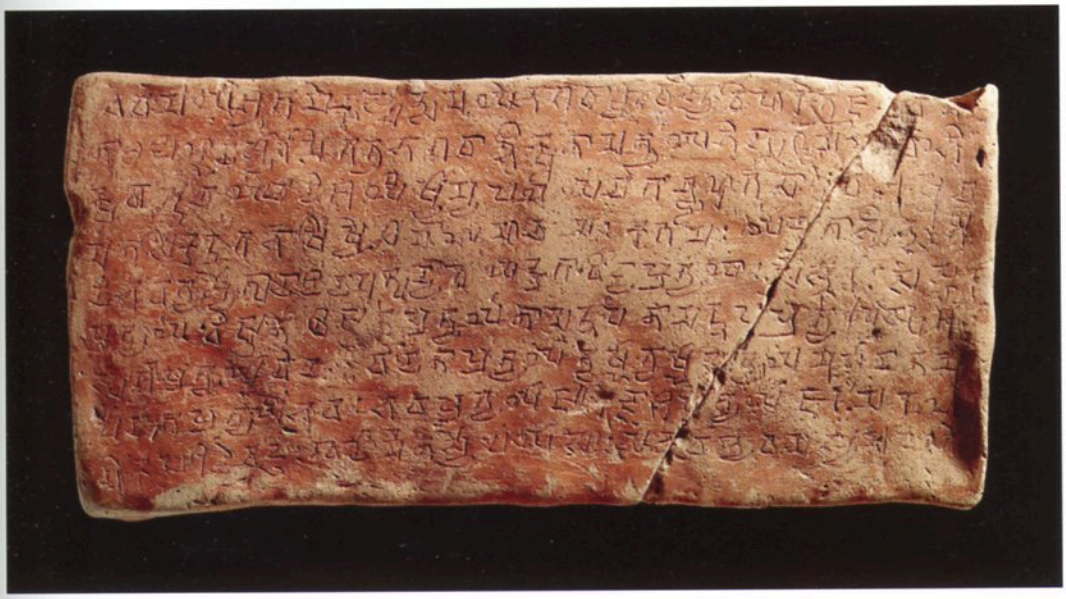
1. vedanāpratyayā tṛṣṇā tṛṣṇā pratyayam
upādānam upādānapratyayo bhavaḥ bhavaprat-
yayā jātiḥ
2. jātipratyayājarāmaraṇaśokaparidevaduḥkhadau-
ramanasyaupāyāsaḥ saṁbhavaṁnti evam asya
3. mahato duḥkhaskandhasya samudayo
bhavati tasya mamaitad abhavat kasminn asati
jarāmaraṇaṁ na bha-
4. vati kasya nirodhāj jarāmaraṇanirodha
iti tasya mama yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ
yathābhutasyābhisa-
5. mayo babhūva jātyām asatyāṁ jarāmaranaṁ
na bhavati jātinirodhāj jarāmaraṇanirodhah tasya
mamaitad a-
6. bhavat kasminn asati jātir nna bhavati
kasya nirodhāj jātinirodha iti tasya mama
yoniśomanasikurvvata
7. evaṁ yathābhutasyābhisamayo babhūva bhave
asati jātir nna bhavati bhavanirodhāj jātinirodha iti
8. tasya mamaitad abhavat kasminn asati bhavo
na bhavati kasya nirodhād bhavanirodha iti tasya
mama yoniśoma-
9. nasikurvvata evaṁ yathābhutasyābhisa-
mayo babhūva upādāne sati[22] bhavo na bhavaty
upādānanirodhād bhava-
10. nirodha iti tasya mamaitad abhavat kasminn
asatyupādānaṁ na bhavati kasya nirodhād
upādānanirodha iti tasya
11. mama yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ yathāb-
hutasyābhisamayo babhūva tṛṣṇāyāṁ satyām[23]
upādānaṁ na bhavati
12. tṛṣṇānirodhād upādānanirodhaḥ tasya
mamaitad abhavat

TABLET III OBVERSE

1. kasminn asati tṛṣṇā na bhavati kasya nirodhāt
tṛṣṇānirodha iti tasya mama yoniśo-
2. manasikurvvata evaṁ
yathābhutasyābhisamayo babhūva vedanāyāṁm
asatyāṁ tṛṣṇā
3. na bhavati vedanānirodhāt tṛṣṇānirodhaḥ tasya
mamaitad abhavat kasminn asati vedanā
4. na bhavati kasya nirodhād vedanānirodha iti
tasya mama yoniśomanasikurvvata
5. evaṁ yathābhutasyābhisamayo babhūva sparśe
sati[24] vedanā na bhavati sparśani-
6. rodhād ve[danā]nirodaḥ tasya mamaitad abhavat
kasminn asati sparśo na bhavati kasya niro-
7. dhāt sparśanirodha iti tasya mama
yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ yathābhutasyābhisa-
8. -mayo babhūva ṣaḍāyatane [asat]i sparśo na
bhavati ṣaḍāyatananirodhāt sparśa-
9. nirodhaḥ tasya mamai[tad abhavat] kasminn
asati ṣaḍāyatanaṁ na bhavati ka[sya] nirodhāt ṣaḍā-
10. ya[tana]nirodha iti tasya mam
yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ
yathābhutasyābhisama-
11. yo [babh]ūva nāmarūpe asati ṣaḍāyatanaṁ na
bhavati nāmarūpanirodhāt ṣaḍāyatana-
12. nirodhaḥ tasya mamaitad abhavat kasminn
asati nāma

TABLET III REVERSE

1. rūpaṁ na bhavati kasya nirodhān
nāmarūpanirodha iti tasya mama
yoniśomanasikurvva-
2. ta evaṁ yathābhutasyābhisamayo babhūva
vijñāne asati nāmarūpaṁ na bhavati
3. vijñānanirodhān nāmarūpanirodhaḥ tasya
mamaitad abhavat kasminn asati vijñā-
4. naṁ na bhavati kasya nirodhād vijñānanirodha
iti tasya mama yoniśomanasi-
5. kurvvata evaṁ yathābhutasyābhisamayo
babhūva saṁskāreśv asatsu vijñānaṁ na bha-
6. vati[25] vijñānanirodhaḥ tasya mamaitad abhavat
kasminn asati saṁskārā na bhavanti
7. kasya nirodhāt saṁskāranirodha iti tasya mama
yoniśomanasikurvvata evaṁ ya-
8. thābhutasyābhisamayo babhūva avidyāyām
asatyāṁ saṁskārā na bhavanti avidyā-



121.4 reverse

9. nirodhāt Saṁskāranirodhaḥ saṁskāranirodhād vijñānanirodhaḥ vijñānanirodhān nāmarūpa-
10. nirodhaḥ nāmarūpanirodhāt ṣaḍāyatananirodhaḥ ṣaḍāyatananirodhāt sparśaniro[dhaḥ]
11. sparśanirodhāt vedanānirodhaḥ vedanānirodhāt tṛṣṇānirodhaḥ tṛṣṇānirodhāt upādā-
12. nanirodhaḥ upādānanirodhād bhavanirodhaḥ bhavanirodhā

lists a series of related early inscribed texts. He provides a rubbing of the Nalanda tablet, which has a similar inscription and is of a comparable size. Comparable also is the Kasia copper plate inscription (reported by Dr Hiranand Sastri and published by F. E. Pargiter, *Annual report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1910–11*, Calcutta: Government Printing, 1914, pp. 71 ff., which also has the same sutra. For the other tablet from Nalanda, see A. Ghose, 'An Inscribed Brick from Nalanda of the Year 197', *Epigraphica Indica*, XXIV, 1984, pp. 20–2 and pl. ff.19, which was found in the core of a votive stupa. Referring to the same inscriptions he had previously published, E. H. Johnston in 'Some Sanskrit Inscriptions of Arakan', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1944, pp. 357–85, says, 'For the peculiar initial *i* of the bell I can only quote an inscribed brick (*Epigraphica Indica*, XXIV, pp. 20–2), recently discovered at Nalanda, which is dated 197 (evidently Gupta Era) and which proclaims its eastern origin by its forms of śa, ṣa, and ha, thereby differing from the similar bricks previously discovered at Nalanda and Gopalpur (*Epigraphica Indica*, XXI, pp. 19ff., and *JRAS*, 1938, p. 547ff.)', confirming his view that these tablets are almost certainly of the Gupta period. The Gopalpur inscriptions were cited again in G. K. Nariman, M. Winternitz, S. Lévi, E. Huber, eds., *Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972, p. 8. I am grateful to Prof. Harry Falk and Dr Sam van Schaik for their numerous personal communications, confirming that the palaeography of these inscriptions may be dated to the sixth century AD.

8 Even though Vincent Smith changed his initial opinion about the tablets being *c.*400 AD and attributed them to the second century AD on the basis of the coins, the palaeography does not permit one to give them a Kushan date. See V. A. Smith, 'Deposit of Sutras in Stupas', *Indian Antiquary*, 1904, July, pp. 17ff.

9 P. C. Bagchi, 'A Note on the Pratityasamutpada Sutra', *Epigraphica Indica* 21, no. 33, 1934, pp. 204–7, and D. Boucher, 'The Pratityasamutpadagatha and its Role in the Medieval Cult of the Relics', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 14, 1991, pp. 1–27.

10 R. Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 133–59.

11 E. Lamotte, 'Conditioned Co-production and Supreme Enlightenment', in S. Balassoriya et al., eds., *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, London, Vimamsa, Sri Lanka: Gordon Fraser, 1980, pp. 118–32. Alex Wayman's many writings on this sutra brought out its differences in text and some deeper meanings ('Buddhist dependent origination', *History of Religions* 10, 1970, pp. 185–203; 'Dependent Origination: The Indo-Tibetan Tradition', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 7, 1980, pp. 275–300.) More recently these have been analysed by A. Hirakawa, C. Cox and G. R. Elder in R. K. Sharma, ed., *Researches in Indian and Buddhist Philosophy, Essays in Honour of Professor Alex Wayman*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, pp. 105–62, and R. Bucknell, 'Conditioned Arising Evolves: Variation and change in textual accounts of the *Paticca-samuppada* doctrine', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22 (2), 1999. To see how this doctrine defines itself using metaphor and terms derived from the Vedic world, while also using the same to show its distinctiveness from the Vedic world, see J., Jurewicz, 'Playing with fire: The *pratityasamutpada* from the perspective of Vedic thought', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XXVI, 2000, pp. 77–104.

12 Rather puzzlingly, Johnston makes a correction to Smith and Hoey's 1896 transcription of this line in his article, 'The Gopalpur Bricks', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1938, pp. 547–53, suggesting we read *āmantrayate* instead of *āmantrayati*. However, *āmantrayati* does not actually feature in their inscription.

13 This, as per Johnston's correction, should read *sādhu ca suṣṭu ca*, based on the clearer inscription in Tablet 4.

14 Johnston 1938, *op. cit.*, states that, as per the sutra, a line is missing between the present lines 4 and 5, yet there appears to be no space for it.

15 Johnston 1938, *op. cit.*, points out that *ṣaḍāyatana* is missing from the chain in Tablet 1, whereas it is present in Tablet 4.

16 Johnston 1938, *op. cit.*, says: read *duḥkhādaurmanasyo* instead of *duḥkhādermanasyo*.

17 Johnston 1938, *op. cit.*, points out that *sparśa* is missing from the chain in Tablet 1, whereas it is present in Tablet 4.

18 For *Kepamasya* read *kevalasya*.

19 For *asya nandaḥ* read *abhyanandan*.

20 Read *yaṁ*.

21 Read *pratyayaṁ ṣaḍāyatanaṁ*.

22 Read *asati*.

23 Read *tṛṣṇāyāṁ asatyām*.

24 Read *asati*.

25 *saṁskāranirodhād* has been omitted.

1 E. Thomas, in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (JASB)* XXIV, 1855, p. 499, and V. A. Smith, in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (JASB)* LIII, 1, 1884, p. 152.

2 V. A. Smith and W. Hoey, 'Buddhist Sutras Inscribed on Bricks found at Gopalpur in Gorakhpur District', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1896, p. 100.

3 E. H. Johnston, 'The Gopalpur Bricks', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1938, p. 548.

4 J. Filliozat, 'Les origines de l'écriture tibétaine', *Comptes rendus de la Société Asiatique*, séance du 10 mars 1939, *Journal Asiatique* 231, *1939*, p. 283.

5 See I. Shoju, *Chibettogo koten bunpogaku*, Kyoto: Hozo-kan, 1954, pp. 1–3.

6 S. Beyer, *The Classical Tibetan Language*, New York: State University of New York, 1992, pp. 40–1.

7 N. P. Chakravarti, 'Two Brick Inscriptions from Nalanda', *Epigraphia Indica* XXI, 1934, pp. 199–204,

122 Portion of a coping of a stone railing

Probably late Gupta or post-Gupta period, sixth–seventh centuries AD
Bodhgaya
Coarse grained granite
H. 35.5, L. 79, W. 31 cm
EAX.391

PUBLISHED: J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 29

Bodhgaya remains the most sacred of Buddhist pilgrimage sites. It was here that Siddhartha meditated under the Bodhi tree (a pipal or *Ficus religiosa*), thus becoming 'the Buddha' or Awakened One. Archaeological evidence at the site shows that by the Mauryan period in the third century BC, Bodhgaya had already become a major site of commemoration. The Bodhi tree was the principal focus, with a stone platform, called a *vajrasana*, and a monolithic pillar reportedly erected there by the emperor Ashoka (reigned 268–32 BC). An impressive stone *vedika*, erected some time in the post-Mauryan period, is variously dated between the early second to first centuries BC. Another railing was added in the late Gupta period, from which this coping stone is thought to come.[1]

The coping stone is carved on both sides. On the outer side the railing would typically have borne a frieze of mythical auspicious and talismanic animals, a portion of which is evident in this piece. Here we see a peacock, its tail breaking out into a swirl of foliage, followed by a *makara* (a mythical aquatic creature), with a pair of *hamsas* (literally geese, but associated with widespread symbolism) behind, facing in the other direction. Typical of the Gupta period, the scrolling foliage is exuberant, with the undercutting behind its leaves. In the corner may be spotted another pair of *hamsas* that face the opposite direction.

On the inner face of the railing runs a frieze depicting a series of floral or spiralling roundels separated by slim and stylised *vajras*, or thunderbolts, often symbolic of wisdom (here almost resembling a bead-and-reel pattern). This latter feature, along with the presence of what may be a small, bell-shaped stupa set between the geese in the corner on the opposite face of the stone, and a relative shallowness and schematisation in the carving, serves to suggest a post-Gupta date.

1 For other portions of the coping, see A. K. Coomaraswamy, *La Sculpture de Bodhgaya*, *Ars Asiatica* XVIII, Paris, 1935, pls. III, XLI; also H. Härtel, *Indische Skulpturen: Teil I, Die Werke der frühindischen, klassischen und frühmittelalterlichen Zeit*, Berlin: Museum für Völkerkunde, 1960, Tafel 31 (MIK No. IC8817), and C. Bautze-Picron, *The Art of Eastern India in the Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1998, cat. 276, pp. 104, 254.

123 Sculpted frieze with *hamsa* and foliage

Late Gupta or post-Gupta period, sixth–seventh centuries AD
Central India
Sandstone
H. 22, L. 65, W. 14 cm
EAX.385

This lintel probably belonged to a temple doorway. The type of sandstone and carving style were in use at a number of sites in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and it is not possible to determine exactly where this piece is from. Like Cat. nos. 118 and 122 it depicts a mythical creature, in this case a *hamsa* (goose), whose tail turns into luxuriant scrolling foliage.

Temple doorways invariably bear auspicious or talismanic imagery. Lotuses, *makaras* and *hamsas* inhabit the fertile waters; it is thus natural for them to be depicted alongside *mithuna* or erotic scenes of loving couples, while the divine rivers Ganga and Yamuna are personified as goddesses on temple gateways or doorjambs.

124 Head

Gupta period, fifth century AD
North Indian plains
Terracotta
H. 8.8 cm
EA1958.14
Gift of E. M. Scratton

The style of this head is consistent with terracottas of the Gupta period. It has an oval face with large, protruding eyes, marked out with sharp incised lines. The nose of the figure is damaged and its hair, incised with deep grooves, is arranged in a topknot. While this topknot might lead one to speculate that the complete figure could have represented an ascetic or warrior, its specific, schematised treatment suggests that it is more likely to be female.

125 Warrior

Fifth–sixth centuries AD
Gangetic plains
Terracotta
H. 29 cm
EA2000.111
Given in memory of Prof. R. O. Jones by his wife and daughters

With its oval face set with large eyes under a bow-shaped brow and its prominent, everted lower lip set within a round face, this bust of a warrior figure is executed in a characteristically Gupta style. His mouth breaks into a smile and a moustache is incised over his upper lip. Heavy ear ornaments have distended his ear lobes and he wears chainmail armour. His arms and legs have been broken off, and the surface is worn and pitted. Judging by the angle of what remains of his legs, the figure would probably have been in animated motion, infusing it with a liveliness of spirit typical of the many terracotta sculptures retrieved from Hindu temples of the Gupta period.

126 Gupta seal

Fourth–fifth centuries AD
North India
Bronze
3 cm square
EA2005.76

This is an excellent example of a bronze seal from the Gupta period. The upper half bears a lion looking over his shoulder, while the lower section has an inscription in Gupta period Brahmi characters. It reads 'Jivadatasya', meaning 'belonging to Jivadata', the owner of the seal. On its reverse is a small rounded loop through which the seal could have been strung.

A similar seal, though with a more static lion and an inscription, is recorded from Kashmir Smast.[1]

1 M. N. Khan and M. S. Khan, 'Some more Lajja Gauri seals and related antiquities from Kashmir Smast – Gandhara', *The Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Peshawar, vol. XI, 1–2, 2006, p. 712, seal no. 4, which reads 'Varahamasya'.

127 Chakrapurusha

Late fifth to sixth centuries AD
Central or North India
Sandstone
H. 13.8 cm
EAX.2016

A *chakra* (wheel) is the attribute that Vishnu most commonly holds in his left hand. In the early sculptures of the Gupta and immediately post-Gupta periods, the deity's principal attributes of the *chakra* and *gada* (mace) were personified and positioned as diminutive attendants, flanking his standing image. This sculpture is a fragment from such a sculptural group. Its imagery of a figure with curly hair, wearing a short dhoti and standing against the *chakra*, is typical of fifth to sixth century workmanship from Central or North India. The sculpture is in a dark pink sandstone, known to be mostly concentrated in the Mathura region.

The image of the dwarf has a long history in Indian iconography, as *ganas*, a class of semi-divine dwarves related to *yaksha* nature-spirits and celestial dancers and musicians, were frequently used as caryatids (as at Sanchi, where they carry the gateway), or as apotropaia (made into children's toys, or carved on the outer walls of stupa *vedikas*). In an extension of this role of strength and talismanic power, by the fifth century they acquired the role of the personification of divine weapons as well.

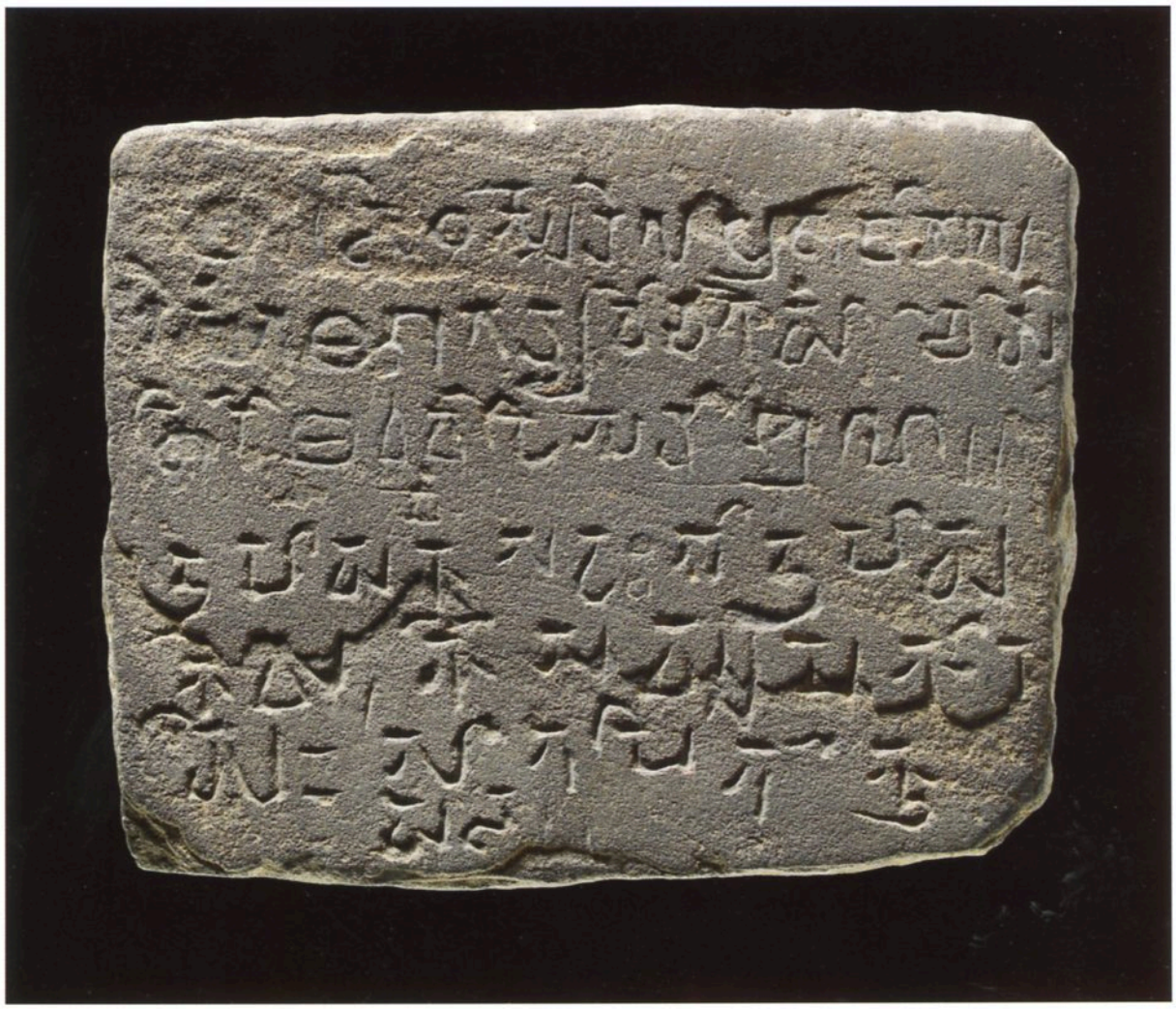
The figure holds a bowl filled with offerings, rather like a devotee. The *chakra* itself is composed of elongated, lozenge-shaped spokes, and there remains a portion of Vishnu's left hand resting above it, in a format more generally thought of as North Indian. An inscription on the reverse of the piece, although largely illegible, still has a few letters that can be discerned as a late Gupta to immediately post-Gupta style of Brahmi, associated with northern India.

128 *Gana*

Fifth–sixth centuries AD
North India
Sandstone
H. 29 cm
EAOS.53
Purchased 1937 with a grant from the Max Müller Memorial Fund

Gana figures have an ancient history in Indian iconography, being found in sculpture from the second century BC onward. By the fifth century AD, such small, grimacing dwarves had become associated with the *ganas* – the lively, anarchic attendants to Shiva and members of his troop. This figure's hair is worn in large, circular curls typical of the Gupta period, and he carries a hammer or mallet in his left hand, appropriate for a member of Shiva's army. Equally, this may be a *damaru* (the common Indian small drum associated with Shiva) on a stick. What the figure holds in the other hand is unidentifiable, being largely broken off. Although badly worn and damaged, the pale beige sandstone and general style of carving suggest that the sculpture is North Indian.

129 Buddhist inscription



*c.*Fifth century AD
Western India
Stone
H. 18.5, W. 14.4 cm
EAX.401

The inscription on this stone tablet was read by Shri H. K. Narasimhaswami, Govt. Epigraphist for India at Ootacamund (now Udagamandalam).[1] He noted that it was in a mixed dialect and syllabary, from western India and datable to the fifth century AD.

The inscription is not entirely legible, but it is clear that it is a typical Buddhist donative plaque, with the canonical Sutra of Dependent Origination (which can also be seen on other tablets from India, as in Cat. 121):

[Siddham] Ye dhamma hetu-prabhavā hetu[ṁ]
te[ṣāṁ] tathāgata (to=)hy=avoda[t] / teṣā (śa) ṅ=ca yo
nirodha eva[ṁ] vādī mahāśra[ma]ṇa[h] //
Upasakka (ka) [Sa]dah Sa[kya] upasa –
k[e] (kah) Kha[ga]ko (kah) sa[r]va[ssa(sa)] [ttvo]
pakara(ra) –
ye // mata (ta)-pita (tri) ku –
sala(sali)

1 A letter from him dated 30 August 1961 (ref. DO no. 120/3171) is in the Museum's records. Two torn pieces of paper still adhere to the back of the tablet. They are barely legible and, tantalisingly, all the most relevant information is now missing: 'Presented by Col. Fry...', 'Found in January in ... cavity of a hill close ... the village ... N... the ...', followed by a missing date at the end of the inscription.

5

EASTERN INDIA AND THE DECCAN

< Detail of Cat. 135

130 Bird-headed female figurine

Third century BC to first century AD
Chandraketugarh, Bengal
Red terracotta
H. 13 cm
EAX.2908
Gift of Douglas McDougall

The figurine is roughly modelled by hand, with a large head pinched in the centre to form a beak-like projection, short stumps for arms and a widening, elongated torso. Small pellets are used for eyes that are given prominence by small incised lines radiating from them and a small pierced dot within for the pupils. Incised lines mark the neck and short necklace.

This figurine was collected from the surface of a site that has come to be called 'Chandraketugarh' and is, as such, not securely dateable. Stylistically, too, it is a type found across many periods, ranging from the third century BC to at least the first century AD, and at many northern Indian and Pakistani sites to which it can be compared. The well-fired clay has a high iron content that would have been a dark grey colour (revealed in the core of its broken left arm); it has reddened in the oxidising environment of a kiln.

Archaeology in the deltaic sites of Bengal is beset with enormous problems because of the exceptionally high level of groundwater and the centuries of disturbance because of tsunamis and floods, making dating on the basis of neat stratigraphy in excavations quite unreliable. Additionally, the area which reveals the so-called Chandraketugarh-style objects, appears to be spread over fields that belong to a cluster of villages rather than a single site. It is unlikely that they were all simultaneously inhabited, but saw rapid population shifts owing to the frequent floods and constantly changing course of the rivers and estuaries. Importantly, however, the figurine can be compared with several found in the Mathura, Kaushambi and Patna areas. Along with the earliest types of pottery found in the region, it reveals a more ancient foundation for the sites of the Bengal Delta – one suggestive of connections with the cultural and archaeological fabric of the earliest historical period of the Ganga Valley plains.

131 Thirteen sherds

Third century BC to second century AD
Chandraketugarh, Bengal
Grey, buff and red terracotta
EAX.2910 (a–p)
Gift of Douglas McDougall

These are typical sherds of the vast amounts of utilitarian wares that have been found at the site of Chandraketugarh. Some of them are in fact dateable to at least as early as the fourth century BC, while others in this sampling represent types popular up to the third century AD. Excavations at the site have revealed continuous habitation from pre-Mauryan times to the Pala period. Although this complete lot comprises 16 sherds (ten grey and black sherds, two complete clay rims of pots, two incised relief fragments and two irregular fragments from sculptures or reliefs), only 13 of the pottery fragments, illustrated here, can be assigned to the Early Historic period. These include four major types of ware: a plain grey ware; a black polished ware (resembling a degraded Northern Black Polished Ware, which has a relatively late Mauryan and post-Mauryan occurrence at the site); intact galleried rims, belonging to either flat-bottomed rounded jars or to small amphorae (*kamandalu*); and an orange to red ware that bears incised cross-hatching.[1]

1 The variety of pottery from the cluster of villages called 'Chandraketugarh' is increasingly attracting more scientific research that may eventually establish a more reliable chronology for the site. For a summary of these studies see A. K. Das, S. Panja, T. K. Mukhopadhyay and S. Chakrabarti, 'Pottery technology provenance studies from the site of Chandraketugarh in Lower Bengal', in G. Sengupta and S. Panja, eds., *Archaeology of Eastern India: New perspectives*, Kolkata, 2001, pp. 419–43.

132 Dish with incised fish

Second to first centuries BC
Chandraketugarh area, Bengal
High-fired, black-polished grey terracotta
diam. 14 cm
EA1999.26

One large and three smaller fish are incised on the base of a shallow dish against a cross-hatched background. Very few examples of a decorated grey or black ware are known from Early Historic India, and this is a rare intact example of this little-known type.[1] Traces of a slip remain that shows the piece would have been fired to a lustrous black. It was fired in a heavily reducing atmosphere, accentuating the lustrous nature of the minerals present in the slip, and is probably a continuation of the older tradition of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) that has been widely found in North India between the sixth and third centuries BC.

Post-Mauryan black wares such as this, however, show some differences from NBPW: the slip does not seem to have completely adhered to the body, they are not as lustrous and they are decorated. Most of these vessels seem to bear motifs and symbols associated with water, such as lotuses, fish or *makaras*. Chandraketugarh continues to yield both functional and fine decorative ware datable to the Early Historic period.

1 A larger example in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (no. 1993.371) shows a bee hovering over a lotus. It also bears some cross-hatching and is similarly fired to a dark grey to black. Another example at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (AC1996.54.1) is carved with an as yet undeciphered Brahmi inscription in high relief, and decorated with three fish and a bird that are incised.

133 Two sherds from Amaravati

133.1 UNGLAZED SHERD
Third century BC to second century AD
Amaravati, South India
L. 8, W. 7.5 cm
EAX.2857
Gift of Douglas Barrett

Remains of Black and Red Ware potsherds and actual megalithic cists in the vicinity of the great stupa at Amaravati strengthen the view that the stupa, which began to be built in the Mauryan period, was erected on a pre-existing site. It also suggests more widely that the cult of the stupa itself, the hemispherical mound of earth raised over the relics of a seer (such as the Buddha), derived from a pre-existing custom of megalithic burials.

This sherd was collected at the surface of the site by Douglas Barrett. Its black base, with the lower part of a red belly incised with a wavy decoration on its base, associate it more generally with Black and Red Ware, and perhaps even with a variant of Northern Black Polished Ware, both of which are found at the site.

133.2 SHERD WITH A RIDING FIGURE
c. First to second centuries AD
Amaravati, South India
Terracotta
H. 2.5, W. 2.2 cm
EAX.2858
Gift of Douglas Barrett

This small sherd from Amaravati is impressed with a motif of a man on an animal (possibly an elephant). Found at the site's surface, it belongs stylistically with stamped pottery types that became popular all over North India, and even in some sites in the Deccan, after the first century BC. The type remained in use until the third century AD.

134 *Chaitya* aedicule with *mithuna*

Second–third centuries AD
Amaravati style, probably at Nagarjunakonda
Limestone
H. 9 cm, W. 16 cm, D. 3 cm
EA2016.27

Although Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda are only two of the most famous Buddhist sites from a region that has about 60 other stupas, many with carvings, they lend their name to the early and later styles of sculpture of the region. These sites of prosperous Buddhist *chaityas*, *viharas* and *stupas*, some with elaborate complexes comprising multiple structures, use a distinctive limestone quarried at Palnad. Their prolific and exquisite sculptural output can be assessed from the remains of the Amaravati stupa preserved at the British Museum, Chennai Museum and the site museums at Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Guntur, Kanganahalli and Phanigiri, to name a few of the most important collections. This fragmentary piece, formerly in the Sherman E. Lee collection, shows a *mithuna* couple standing next to a *chaitya*-arched doorway carved in shallow relief. The earliest surviving representation of this distinctive shape of Indian arch is at the Lomas Rishi cave in the Barabar Hills, Bihar, where it is dateable to the Mauryan period. Foundations for free-standing apsidal *chaitya* shrines have also been widely excavated in India. Whether any of these vaulted buildings had a rose window as shown in this *chaitya* arch is not known from any actual surviving building. The architraves and stone lattices that filled most of them have broken off.

By the second century AD hundreds of *chaitya* arches formed entrances to vaulted Buddhist shrines carved into mountains. Often these rock faces would be decorated with carved representations of architectural forms, rather like aedicules. The small scale and shallowness of the figures of this carving, the greenish tone of the limestone and the fact that this is one such aedicule from what must have been a richly decorated sculptural narrative are all features of the later Amaravati style frequently associated with Nagarjunakonda.

Mithuna or embracing (erotic) couples were placed at entrances to Buddhist *chaityas*, where they performed a talismanic function of being protective and auspicious. They become a standard iconographic feature placed at entrances to Hindu temples from the fifth century AD onward. The earliest evidence of this, however, is to be found at the entrances to Buddhist monuments. At stupas they are invariably placed at the corner or entrance pillar of the *vedika*; at the rock-cut *chaitya* caves they can be found again, either flanking the entrance to a shrine or on either side of statues of the Buddha. In all these cases it is the entrance to the most sacred part of the shrine – that is, either the relic-containing stupa or the image of the Buddha himself – that needs to be flanked by *mithuna* imagery. Their purpose therefore is obviously talismanic – a protective charm that draws positive energy to the shrine. This point has been widely noted by scholars, with an examination of the Bhaja and Karle sites as well as Bharhut. The iconographic formula has also been commented on in contemporaneous stupas of Gandhara.[1] Equally early are scores of terracotta plaques with *mithunas* that have also been dated to the late Early Historic period. However, nowhere is the motif more beautifully and elaborately expressed than in the finely carved stupas of the Deccan, including Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.[2]

1 The oldest surviving versions of this, however, are probably at Bharhut and Bodh Gaya (although several scholars have dated the Bodh Gaya railing to the second to first centuries BC, I believe that some of the sculptures in higher relief made of Chunar sandstone are more likely to be Mauryan). See Devangana Desai, *Erotic sculpture of India: A socio-cultural study*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, pp. 15–28, pls. 23–6. Contemporaneous erotic imagery at sites in Swat and Gandhara is recorded by Klaus Fischer, 'Auftraggeber, Bildhauer und Verehrende von mithuna-Gruppen in der mittelmeerländisch-indischen Mischkunst', in A. Gail, ed., *Künstler und Werkstatt in den orientalischen Gesellschaften*, Graz: Akademische Druck –u. Verlagsanstalt, 1982, pp. 119–34.

2 Listed in V. V. Sudha Piratti, *Mithuna in Buddhist Art (with special reference to Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda)*, Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 2002.

135 Mould for a plaque of a standing goddess and her attendant

First century BC–first century AD[1]
Bengal, probably Chandraketugarh
Terracotta
H. 23.2 cm
EAI993.35
Gift of the Friends of the Ashmolean

PUBLISHED: N. Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture*, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 168; J. K. Bautze, *Early Indian Terracottas*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, pl. 111b.

The goddess has one arm akimbo and the other touching her earring. She is heavily bejewelled, with tassels of beads hanging from her large, disc-shaped earrings and her girdle, worn low across her hip. Her necklaces are worn both short (with pendants falling around the base of her neck) and long (reaching below her navel); a tight waistband is tied below her breasts, while large bracelets and anklets adorn her arms and feet. Typically, her coiffure is treated elaborately – divided into three large buns (held in place by rows of beads or pearls and various bands) in which she wears ten weapon-shaped ornaments. She is clad in a diaphanous lower garment which billows around her ankles. With its fine stippled detailing, larger than average size, ornamentation and surrounding petal border on the perimeter, as well as the iconography of the goddess and the pale buff to grey clay from which it is made, this mould can be compared to several others excavated from the Chandraketugarh area of Bengal.[2]

The presence of weapons in the hair is a ubiquitous feature of terracotta goddesses from across the northern plains of South Asia in the post-Mauryan period. However, scholarship has not yet been able to identify this goddess more definitively, or if indeed, it refers to a specific goddess (rather than a generic type of costuming).[3] Whereas the number of such weapon-shaped accoutrements are usually five, a greater (or sometimes lesser) number have also been found in Bengal.

The mirror-bearing diminutive female attendant also wears interesting headgear. Her tall, conical cap bears three rows of circular bosses between fine 'pearl' borders ending, on top, in the head of a peacock (possibly a cockerel). The general shape of the cap is known from a few significant examples; it was inspired by Shaka (Scythian) examples or Phrygian prototypes from Central Asia.[4] The mirror, a familiar attribute in other depictions of the goddess with weapons, becomes common in examples of later Indian female divinities, where it signifies both adornment and the qualities of psychological insight and perception.[5] Mirror-bearing attendants to the goddesses are common in the terracotta plaques of the period, and have been found at various sites in the north Indian plains and Bengal.[6]

The thousands of terracotta plaques surviving from the post-Mauryan period were impressed from moulds such as this. Some moulds are plainer, their impressions creating simple figures in relief which were adorned by using smaller stamps for jewellery. However, most surviving moulds, particularly those from Bengal, are so refined as to create perfectly formed and highly detailed plaques from a single impression alone. This is particularly evident in the present mould, which is impressed exceedingly finely with dots and faint lines. The resulting impression would bear the diagnostic florid stippled ornament and diaphanous drapery so popular in the plaques of Chandraketugarh and Tamluk. The mould is made along a straight plane except at the feet. Here it curves, resulting in impressions in which otherwise straight plaques have projecting feet. This is a shrewd technological device of the terracotta artists, both facilitating the removal of the plaque from the mould and creating a piece that gave some impression of depth, even if the feet would have been at an unnatural angle. This also explains why a great number of plaques survive in which the feet have been broken off: the area of the curve that broke the plane of the flat plaque was the most fragile part.

A thick liquid clay or slurry was poured into the porous terracotta mould which would rapidly absorb the water in the clay. This shrank the plaque so that it would naturally be easy to prise off the mould. In the process of drying and through firing the impressed plaque would shrink further, making the detail on its surface seem much finer than the mould. However, there remains the tantalising question of how the moulds themselves were made. No object has yet been recovered that can definitely be understood to be the 'first' positive. The iconography is almost completely unknown in stone sculpture, and examples in media other than clay include a tiny one in quite crude gold repoussé and some exquisite small ivories, none of which could have been used to make such a mould. A few pieces in wood have recently come to light, but their workmanship is too coarse to have produced as detailed an object as this. It is likely that a rough original may have been modelled out of clay by hand, fired and used as a first impression in a thick slab of clay to make a mould. The negative would have been carefully incised with lines and dots and further impressed with stamps of rosettes to create the detail. At the same time it is possible, though less likely, that a first original was made of soft wax (already in use for bronze casting) over which putty-like clay would have been impressed. Any traces of wax would have evaporated when the mould was fired.

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1 Thermoluminescence tested by Oxford Authentication archeological laboratories in April 1993 and found to have last been fired 1500–2300 years ago.

2 An almost identical mould is in the Neumann collection: Bautze 1995, *op. cit.*, pl. 111a.

3 See further observations on this iconography with regard to Cat. 136 (EAX.201).

4 The motif has a long ancestry; in Iran and Central Asia it is known in Parthian and Sasanian art. An almost identical motif, except that the cap ends in the head of a bird of prey (possibly an eagle), is seen on a stone head from Gandhara in a French private collection: see E. Errington and J. Cribb, eds., *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol*, Cambridge: The Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992, no. 124, pp. 120–1, for detailed references to this. For references to its links with Phrygian caps as seen with the god Mithra (*without* a bird-shaped terminus) see the small terracotta male head, Cat. 38 in the present catalogue.

136 Standing goddess

5 In later Indian art the mirror in the hand of Parvati, for instance, is understood as the attribute of *prakriti* or nature which reflects the essence of Shiva, the deity who represents the unknowable absolute, *purusha*, approachable and realised through her.
6 See Bautze 1995, *op. cit.*, pl. XXC, in the Kronos collection, and pl. XXI, in the Neumann collection, both from the Chandraketugarh area. Also from Bengal is a piece in the Los Angeles County Museum, no. M.85.35.2: see P. Pal, *Indian Sculpture*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986, vol. 1.

c. First century BC
Tamluk, Bengal
Terracotta
H. 21.3, W. 9.9 cm
EAX.201

PUBLISHED: G. Bysack, 'Note on some copper coins, and a terracotta figure', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, March 1888, pp. 113–14, pl. III; S. Kramrisch, 'Indian Terracottas', *JISOA*, VII, 1939, pp. 88–110 (reprinted in B. S. Miller, ed., *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings by Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); E. H. Johnston, *Report of Curators of the Indian Institute for 1938–9*; E. H. Johnston, in *Annual Bibliography of Indian Archaeology for the year 1939*, vol. XIV, p. 16, Pl. V; E. H. Johnston, 'A terra-cotta figure at Oxford', *JISOA*, X, 1942, pp. 94–102; S. K. Saraswati, *Yearbook of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal for 1949*, pp. 174–5; J. Auboyer, *Daily Life in Ancient India*, London: Weidenfeld, 1961, and New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994, pl. 15; S. K. Saraswati, *Early Sculpture of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1962, Ch. 8, n. 9, and pp. 96–102, pl. XVI; C. Sivaramamurti, *The Arts of India*, New York: Abrams, 1977, p. 367, no. 407; R. N. Misra, *Yaksha Cult and Iconography*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981, p. 138, pl. 86; B. Durrans and R. Knox, *India: Past into Present*, exhib. cat., London: British Museum Press, 1982, p. 47; J. C. Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, fig. 24, p. 40; J. and S. L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1985, fig. 5.39, p. 88; A. Poster, *From Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*, exhib. cat., Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1986, pp. 22–3, fig. 2; J. C. Harle and A. Topsfield, *Indian Art in the Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1987, no. 6; S. Stronge et al., *A Golden Treasury: Jewellery from the Indian Subcontinent*, London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988; M. Postel, *Ear Ornaments of Ancient India*, Bombay: Franco-India Pharmaceuticals, 1989, p. 2; S. Pande, 'A note on the enigma of the so-called panca-cuda figurines', in S. D. Trivedi, ed., *Sunga Art*, Allahabad: Allahabad Museum, 1991, pl. XXI, fig. 3; N. Penny, *The Materials of Sculpture*, 1993, p. 168; D. K Chakrabarti, 'Post-Mauryan states of Mainland South Asia', Ch. 12 in F. R. Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia – The Emergence of Cities and States*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995, p. 325, fig. 12.3 (1); L. Lynton, *The Sari*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1995, p. 10; V. K. Mathur, *Art and Culture under the Sungas*, Delhi: Bharatiya Kala Prakashan, 1996, fig. 56; O. Untracht, *Traditio Jewelry of India*, New York: Abrams, 1997, no. 691; N. P. Ahuja, *Divine Presence*, Barcelona and Milan: Five Continents, 2003, fig. 7, p. 24; N. P. Ahuja, 'Changing Gods, Enduring Ritua Observations on Ancient Indian religion as se through Terracotta Imagery *c.*200 BC – AD 10 in C. Jarrige and V. Lefèvre, eds., *South Asian Archaeology* 2001, vol. 2, Paris, 2005, fig. 2, p. 3

This plaque was the first of its type to be discovered, and remains the most well-known of all early Indian terracottas. It has been used as a standard against whic subsequent researches on post-Mauryan styles and certain religious or cultic mor are measured. The goddess has a flat, rou smiling face with a *tilak* or *bindu* marked on the forehead. She sports an elaborate tripartite headdress which consists of th proper right coque sporting five weapon a conical lotiform element in the centre and a large, turban-like arrangement on the left; the whole headdress is covered with multiple strings of pearls, beads an ribbons. The weapons in the goddess's headdress may be identified as an *ankush* (elephant goad), a spear or dagger, a hatc or axe and two forms of tridents or *trishu* She stands with the left arm akimbo and the right flanking her torso, with both he hands clasping her girdle. Her extravaga jewellery includes, in her left ear, a large containing six rosettes against a pattern background; in her right ear the same di is at the end of a laterally projecting cylin or bolster, further decorated with entwi rows of floral motifs. Tassels of pearls ar suspended from both discs.

A short collar wrought into a series of crescents alternating with opening buds seems to emulate a type that must have b made of gold. A long, bandolier-like sash worn over the goddess's right shoulder, falls diagonally across her torso. It has a prominent floral element over her right breast, out of which emerge three mythi creatures: a bird, a *makara* with a curling fish tail and an elephant, also with a curli fish tail. A tight waistband of rosettes tra

a gossamer fabric tightly below her breasts. Another ornament, worn diagonally across her torso, is composed of three rows of pearls. Triple heavy bangles are identically arranged on each forearm, with the third in each case the most elaborate, composed of large, frontally arranged floral roundels alternating with a constricting ring. Equally elaborate is the goddess's huge girdle, slung low and asymmetrically across her hips; it comprises three rows of beads, the central one of floral medallions between two rows of alternating gadrooned lozenges and rings. Tassels including ornamental potbellied dwarf *yakshas* (*kumbhandas*) are suspended from the figure's girdle and dangle over her thighs.

The goddess is clad in a diaphanous dhoti around her legs that is taken, interestingly, over the left shoulder, leaving the right bare, as modern saris are worn. Her arms appear bare (unusual in terracotta goddesses), except for a scarf that must be worn over her shoulder as portions of it are seen to fall over her upper arms. The end of the drape billows out like a cape behind her. The background of the plaque is littered with flowers.

Two suspension holes, drilled when the plaque was still leather-hard, are unobtrusively placed on either side of the figure's waistband. The plaque was broken into four pieces and has been repaired in modern times. It is, of course, impressed from a fine mould (compare Cat. 135) and was only minimally worked on further, the secondary retouching being mostly limited to providing some undercutting. As usual, the piece is broken above the ankles where the plaque would have curved forward – a cl artistic strategy to create depth and inte rupt the plane of a flat tablet, but one wh also made the area more fragile and susc tible to breaks. The plaque is a masterwo compensating for the shallowness of rel with florid detailing and taking full adva tage of its malleable medium of clay.

The circumstances in which the objec was found by Babu Gaurdas Bysack in a river bank at Tamluk (ancient Tamralipt in April or May 1883, are known in consi able detail. It was later presented by him exhibition at the Asiatic Society in Calcu Then subsequently (it is not known how the figure entered the collection of the Indian Institute Museum, Oxford, foun by Professor M. Monier-Williams. Ther the goddess was brought to light again b Prof. E. H. Johnston in 1938. He suggest the piece may have come from Kausham where excavations had, by that time, revealed similar objects.[1] However, in 19 S. K. Saraswati confirmed that the plaqu was in fact from Tamluk.[2]

As this was the most important (and one of the only known) figures of its type most stylistic comparisons that could be drawn were to the relief sculptures of the post-Mauryan period, as at Bharhut Bodh Gaya or Sanchi. Stella Kramrisch gave its extraordinary iconography the appellation of the *apsaras Pancacuda*, afte the five-crested celestial nymph whose birth is recorded in the ancient myth of the churning of the ocean.[3] Thereafter th name came into common art historical currency, even though many figures have been found subsequently that have more or less than five weapons in their hair. Johnston proposed that she was the Indi variant of an archetypal divine feminine called 'Maia' or 'Maya', related to Cybele Nanaia and other West Asiatic and Nile Valley goddesses who were also, of cours well-known to the Greeks.[4] However re vations were expressed about those nam and Saraswati[5] saw fit to call her a *yakshi* More recently Pal viewed the figure's ubi uitous deployment of weapons as her sal

iconographic feature and suggested the type may represent a proto-Durga iconography.[6] While this is possible, we must remember that the idea of Durga, as we know her, is a much later one – and perhaps a syncretic one, drawing on the many martial and productive goddesses from both India and Central Asia in this early period of the formation of 'Hindu' iconography (cat. 98).[7] Nor need the presence of the 'weapons' be regarded as constituting her attributes.[8] They are more likely to be symbols of power and beauty, not limited to goddess figures alone, as images of female figures with this headdress have been found in contexts that are not always convincingly religious. This leads one to a larger question, however: that of whether religiously informed imagery could be used in 'secular' domains? We shall return to this question presently.

Even as we consider the interpretations of Maya, proto-Durga, an *apsaras* like *Panchachuda* or a secular figure, what cannot be disputed are this figure's association with the world of *yakshas*. Not only were they widely worshipped at the time, but their presence, falling like talismans on her thighs – along with the other auspicious emblems of the semi-divine beings and symbols of the natural elements such as the *makara*, bird and fish-tailed elephant – are also motifs commonly associated with *yakshas* and *yakshis* at Buddhist stupas.

In images from Kaushambi and from the Middle Ganga Valley the weapon-bearing goddess is usually found standing on a lotus or emerging from a water-tank, linking her more with Lakshmi than Durga.[9] In pieces from the Indo–Gangetic Divide and the Northwest, the weapons are frequently balanced on the other side of the head by sprigs of foliage.[10] Sometimes the weapons may dispensed with altogether; only large sprays of flowers and leaves are shown. In those cases her productive aspects are highlighted, a function to which the plaque's excessive (and highly auspicious) jewellery must also make reference. At the same time one may well question whether these depictions are cultic at all? After all, the comparable bronzes from Bannu (cat. 31) were clearly meant to be attached to some larger object, and would thus have served a decorative purpose. Yet there is a difference in the two types of images: the Bannu ones do not have weapons, while the hieratic goddess with weapons is often represented as being worshipped in Northern and Eastern India. The consistent depiction of the figure over a range of thousands of miles, in exactly the same poses, seen at times in large plaques as the central icon in a shrine flanked by acolytes and attendants, leaves us in no doubt that she is a goddess. Finally it must be noted that, although the figure itself is not associated with Buddhism, two early examples of this iconography come from Buddhist contexts.[11] One, a small gold repoussé plaque, was found in the relic casket of the stupa at Piprahwa,[12] and the other, a life-size image, is from an Andhra stupa (probably Goli).[13] While we are still at a loss to identify her with certainty, the goddess of the 'Oxford plaque' remains one of the most important and finest pieces of its type.

1 E. H. Johnston, 'The Gopalpur Bricks', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1938, pp. 547–53.

2 E. H. Johnston, 'A terra-cotta figure at Oxford', *JISOA*, X, 1942, pp. 94–102, being unaware that the piece had been published by Gaurdas Bysack in 1888, incorrectly states 'It was exhibited in a monthly meeting and was apparently presented, along with ancient coins, discovered on the same occasion and made over to the society'. Bysack's original note (G. Bysack, 'Note on some copper coins, and a terracotta figure', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1888) specifically distinguished between the coins, which were sent for presentation to the Society, and the terracotta figure 'forwarded for exhibition at the meeting'. The more correct account of the circumstances was in fact brought to light by S. K. Saraswati, *Yearbook of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal for 1949*, pp. 174–5.

3 S. Kramrisch, 'Indian Terracottas', *JISOA*, VII, 1939, pp. 100–1.

4 Johnston 1942, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–2.

5 S. K. Saraswati, *Early Sculpture of Bengal*, Calcu 1962, pp. 98.

6 P. Pal, *Icons of Piety, images of Whimsy: Asian Terra-cottas from the Walter-Grounds Collection*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1987, p. 39. This attribution has found favour with others, see M. Lerner and S. Kossak, *The Lotus Transcendent*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991, pp. 54–5; J. K. Bautze, *Early Indian Terracottas*, Lei E.J. Brill, 1995, p. 13.

7 Indeed if the image of this figure does link with Durga this would invite a reinvestigation of Johnston's original hypothesis, for the image of Durga on a lion has been related to the image of Nana, also on the same mount. The myth of the Phrygian Nana is closely woven with Cybele, who was also shown bearing weapons. Both goddesse are connected to the god Mithra whose cult was significant in Central Asia, as it was in much of th ancient world.

8 I have elaborated on this and the variety of othe iconographic possibilities in N. P. Ahuja, 'A Budd interpretation of small finds in the Early Historic Period', in J. Clarke, ed., 'Research Papers 1 on Buddhist Sculpture', *Inner and Central Asian Art an Archaeology*, Brepols Publishing, forthcoming.

9 N. P. Ahuja, 'Changing Gods, enduring Rituals Observations on Early Indian Religion as seen through Terracotta Imagery, *c.* 200 BC–AD 100', in *South Asian Archaeology* 2001, vol. 11, *Historical Archaeology and Art History*, pp. 345–54, C. Jarrige V. Lefèvre, eds, Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2005, pp. 345–54, figs. 7–11.

10 N. P. Ahuja, 'Moulded Terracotta from the In Gangetic Divide, Sugh, Circa 2002 BCE–50 CE', i P. Pal, ed., *Marg*, 2002, figs. 5–7, and N. P. Ahuja, 'Further Studies towards a definition of the style Early Historic Terracottas from the Indo-Ganget Divide', in *The Ananda-vana of Indian Art: Dr. Anan Krishna Festschrift*, N. and M. Krishna, eds., Varan Indica Books and Abhida Prakashan, 2004, pp. 4 58.

11 For a possible Buddhist interpretation, see N. P. Ahuja, 'A Buddhist interpretation of small fi in the Early Historic Period', forthcoming (2018), cited above, n. 8.

12 Although the relics were disturbed, and parts them perhaps forged in the 1880s when the stupa excavated, some objects, such as the gold plaque i the collection of the Indian Museum, Kolkata mu be authentic.; illus. in S. P. Gupta, *The Roots of Indi Art: A Detailed Study of the Formative Period of India Art and Architecture – 3rd and 2nd Century BC*, New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1980, pl. 35 (central).

13 *Masterpieces of Buddhist and Hindu sculpture fro British Museum*, exhib. cat., Kyoto: Kyoto Nationa Museum, Asahi Shinbunsha, 1994: no. 11, p. 53: British Museum no. 1995.10–17.1.

137 Fragment of a plaque with a demon yaksha and a woman

c. First to second centuries AD
Chandraketugarh
Terracotta
L. 5.5, W. 8.3 cm
EAX.2909
Gift of Douglas McDougall

This corroded fragment of a rectangular plaque bears a moulded impression of a woman; she has a large bouffant worn at an angle and grasps an indistinct object. In front of her is another figure, of which only the animated head remains. This figure's face is like the grimacing dwarf *yakshas* and *ganas*, popular in the imagery of the period. Demon *yakshas* were often used as talismanic images on children's rattles to ward off evil spirits, fulfilling their role as protectors of life. They are also associated with the female *yakshis*, providing their mounts (cats. 101, 102). This plaque was donated along with another, a featureless lower torso of a female (EAX.2908), also reportedly from Chandraketugarh.

138 Six circular earrings

*c.*Second–first centuries BC
Eastern or Northern India

138.1
Mottled grey and white stone
Diam. 4 cm
EA1994.118

138.2
Metal (possibly bronze)
Diam. 3.5 cm
EA1994.119
The reverse is hollowed with a depression, reducing the weight of an otherwise heavy ornament.

138.3
Green glass (much corroded)
Diam. 3.6 cm
EA1994.120

138.4
Bone
Diam. 4.3, aperture 2.25 cm
EA1994.121
Concentric circles of bone feature on both sides.

138.5
Bone
L. 3.5 cm max.
EA1994.122
In this item the bone is denuded and warped. The front of the earring is patterned with circles and a depression in centre, and the reverse has been simply turned on a lathe. There is no aperture.

138.6
Fine-grained wood
Diam. 5.2 cm
EA1994.123

These five rings and one (small bone) disc resemble the common types of earrings represented on terracotta figurines of the post-Mauryan period. All but the heavily worn small bone disc are grooved along their side, enabling them to fit in the earlobe. All are carefully made of various media: bone, stone, glass, metal and wood. The quality of wood is of a fine, densely grained type. They are all turned on a lathe to give them concentric bands, and all except the small bone piece bear a circular aperture.[1]

The costuming of figures on Buddhist narratives on stupas and contemporaneous terracotta plaques frequently show women wearing earrings of this shape and size, so there is little doubt about their function and comparisons with excavated pieces leave little doubt about their date. While it may be argued that such objects may have been put to any number of uses (such as pulleys, spindles, loom weights etc.), the tradition of making similar earrings in all kinds of media was widely recorded in several Indian communities well into the twentieth century, where more lavish ones of gold were not uncommon. Earplugs such these would expand the earlobe and need to be replaced periodically with larger pieces. In fact until relatively recently jewellers made ornaments for each ear separately, as no two earlobes would have expanded to the same degree.

At the same time, it is likely that although these pieces of jewellery are made exactly like those that were worn by people, their weight and inexpensive material indicates that they were probably made for effigies at festivals. Real earrings would, in all likelihood, have been made of gold and melted down for their intrinsic value, or refashioned to suit changing tastes. Surviving gold jewellery from this period is largely cere
nial and exceptionally rare, and only las
because it was interred as donative offe
inside the relic caskets of stupas or buri
treasure for safekeeping. Long lists of f
vals survive in ancient sources[2] and the
descriptions reveal that they involved el
orate processions on elephants and oth
animals, with musicians and dancers in
tow, bearers of banners, flags, garlands
incense, and worship of effigies and pill
at a variety of (often temporary) shrines
Images that are made for festivals often
have to look as grand as the most regal
lovingly and laboriously made, but mad
inexpensive materials that are cast awa

1 Objects of this type were first recorded by J. H. Rivett-Carnac, colonial servant, antiquari and a donor to both the Ashmolean and Pitt Riv Museums, in his 'Memorandum on clay discs ca "Spindle Whorls" and Votive Seals found at San Behar, and other Buddhist ruins in the North Western provinces of India', *Journal of the Asiati Society of Bengal*, XLIX, I, 1880, pp. 127–37 and ill

2 Several of these were compiled by V.S. Agraw *Ancient Indian Folk Cults*, Varanasi: Prithivi Prak 1970.

139 Cart in the shape of an owl

c.First century BC–first century AD
Bengal, possibly Chandraketugarh area
Terracotta
H. 10.5 cm
EA1994.73

Originally this mobile toy would have had wheels levered from an axle through the surviving channel in the cart's base. The socket in its back would accommodate a stick to allow the cart to be pushed.[1] The front of the piece is moulded with an impression of a large-headed owl with bulging eyes. The lower portion of the piece is broken, but enough survives to reveal that the owl is standing on a small elephant. An almost identical piece from Chandraketugarh[2] also preserves the same iconography. Although no identical piece is known from Kaushambi, the orange clay and general style were not unknown at that site.

Carts were often made in the form of birds and animals.[3] In the Uluka Jataka story, the owl's nomination to the office of King of the Birds was challenged by the raven. While they chased each other, the Buddha, who had been previously incarnated as a golden *hamsa*, assumed the Kingship.[4] Owls, along with reptiles, are also seen associated with demonic potbellied dwarves (*ganas* and *yakshas*), who were also shaped into rattles and carts.[5] The iconological meaning inherent in the common association of *yakshas* with owls and elephants has still to be fully deciphered.

1 A piece in a private collection in New York shows how such push toys would have been used: N. P. Ahuja, *Early Indian Moulded Terracotta, The Emergence of an Iconography and Variations in Style, c.200 BC–AD 200*, University of London Ph.D dissertation, 2001, fig. 3.277.

2 Two comparable examples are in the collection of West Bengal State Archaeology Museum, Kolkata: nos. 04.132 and 96.109, where the elephant faces the other direction; the design of the feathers also reveals minor differences between the two; illus. in Ahuja 2001, *op. cit.*, fig. 3.281, and G. Sengupta, S. Roy Chowdhury and S. Chakraborty, *Eloquent Earth*, Kolkata: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums West Bengal, 2007, pp. 229–30.

3 Most carts show potbellied humanoids. However, when animal carts are found, they are usually owls, peacocks, oxen, rams or elephants. Occasionally more complex carts portray multiple figures, men riding animals or mythological *yakshas*.

4 The scene is represented in the art of Mathura: see http://ignca.nic.in/jatak021.htm.

5 A group of these has been discussed by J. K. Bautze, 'Two terracotta Toy-carts from Chandraketugarh', in D. Mitra et al., eds., *Nalinikanta Satavarsiki*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1989, p. 125. In later art the owl may be seen as a mount for specific *yoginis* and for Sarasvati.

140 Terrapin or tortoise

c. Third century BC–second century BC
Eastern India, probably Chandraketugarh
Grey terracotta
H. 10, W. 19 cm max.
EA1997.179
Gift of Shirley Day

This charming tortoise is constructed by luting two handmade bowls lip to lip. At the point of joining are attached small lugs, which are shaped into the creature's limbs and a conical tail. A small head cranes upward with pellets for eyes. The upper body of the piece has a hole in its centre.

The piece was obviously made to float. His body is like a buoy, and it is possible that an image was attached or plugged into the hole on its back. The tortoise is, for instance, often perceived as the mount for the river goddess Yamuna; in later iconography it is also seen as the base that supports the universe.

Pieces of this sort are recorded from the Indo-Gangetic plains and Eastern India. The grey clay is indicative of a Mauryan or post-Mauryan date.

141 Fragment with winged lions

*c.*First century BC
Eastern India, probably Chandraketugarh
Blackened terracotta
H. 3.6, W. 4.7 cm (base)
EA1994.105

Unlike most contemporaneous plaques, this piece is not pressed from a mould. Instead, it is carved with winged lions alternating with lotus blossoms. It is made of buff-coloured clay that breaks into a lustrous black, showing that the plaque was fired in a reducing atmosphere in the kiln. Several examples of pots, elaborately carved and impressed with stamped decoration, have been found at Chandraketugarh, and this piece probably belongs to the foot or pedestal of one such pot. The motif of the winged lion is common in post-Mauryan art.

142 Fragment of a plaque with an elephant-headed drummer

*c.*First century BC
Bengal, Chandraketugarh
Pale grey terracotta
H. 7.7, W. 3.8 cm max.
EA1997.16

PUBLISHED: N. P. Ahuja, 'Changing Gods, Enduring Rituals: Observations on Early Indian Religion as seen through Terracotta Imagery *c.*200 BC–AD 100', *South Asian Archaeology 2001*, C. Jarrige and V. Lefèvre, eds., Paris, 2005, vol. 2, fig. 17, p. 351

An elephant-headed drummer is seated on a low stool, playing a drum held between his knees. He wears a short band across his neck. Strings of beads intersect on his torso and short rows of beads, typical of contemporaneous Bengali ornament, are suspended from his bracelets. The fragment preserves traces of another figure's leg and arm seated above him. The whole would have been bordered by a repeating motif of two concentric circular bosses.

It is likely that this is the bottom left part (as seen from the viewer's perspective) of a larger plaque showing a masked dance. At least four other plaques are known that can be closely related to this one. Some of them are impressions from the same mould and, studied together, allow one to reconstruct the narrative composition of which the present plaque is a fragment. None of the known plaques are complete, but together they create a nearly complete and unusual scene. One is recorded from the excavations at Chandraketugarh. The others, including this fragment, are surface collections from the same site. The excavated piece is slightly different iconographically: it shows a group of four figures, with two wearing elephant-headed masks and playing musical instruments. Three other images, now in private collections, show the upper parts of their plaques. In one the elephant-headed figure plucks a bow-shaped harp; the other two feature the left side of the narrative that shows similarly costumed figures dancing with another unmasked figure before a *chaitya*.[1]

Tempting though it may be to associate this figure with Ganesha,[2] it is almost certainly not a depiction of that god. There is not one pre-eminent, potbellied, elephant-headed figure here, but rather several thin, elephant-headed figures engaged in making music and dancing. Several textual sources attest to the widespread rites of music and dance, processions and festivals that formed an active part of early Indian worship.[3] These terracotta images offer us an unusually candid look into the nature of worship at post-Mauryan religious shrines.[4]

1 Two of these are illustrated in Ahuja 2001, *cit.*, figs. 17–18. The excavated piece is housed i Ashutosh Museum, Kolkata: S. S. Biswas, *Ter art of Bengal*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 198 pl. XL(b).

2 See discussion of a possible 'proto-Ganesha stone relief of Hariti from Mathura (cat. 96).

3 A significant collection of these references c be found in V. S. Agrawala, *Ancient Indian Folk* Varanasi: Prithivi Prakashan, 1970.

4 Another little studied piece bearing a maske dance scene is a small stone cup in the Allahab University Museum. This shows several figure thick drapery wearing bird-shaped masks whil plays a bow harp; see Ahuja 2001, *op. cit.*, fig. 1

143 Elephant riders

Second–first centuries BC
Chandraketugarh, Bengal
Terracotta fragment
H. 4, W. 6 cm max.
EA1996.98

PUBLISHED: E. Haque, *Chandraketugarh: A Treasure House of Bengal Terracottas*, Dhaka: International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, *c.*2001, p. 356 (no. B156)

Post-Mauryan plaque images are not of hieratic deities alone. We find a number of narrative subjects as well, though identifying these specifically is difficult; the sites in question have not been horizontally excavated, giving us as a result only peepholes into the past with narrow vertical digs. Few sites have been properly excavated to reveal the variety of structures and contexts in which different objects are found, and in the absence of that information we cannot be sure whether the plaques were found in religious or other contexts. However, what we have been able to establish is that certain mythological narratives were popular.

This fragment, for instance, is part of a popular motif, consistent in its representation across a number of sites. This invariably comprises three figures riding an elephant, steered by a mahout (missing here). Visible in this fragment are the couple seated behind the missing mahout, with a small child or attendant behind them. Only traces of the main male figure remain. He is bejewelled, with the usual charm of fine Bengali terracottas, wearing a stippled necklace with pendant rows of beads and multiple bracelets – including a spiralling one that looks like the well-known ancient coiling serpent type. By contrast, the woman seated behind him wears none of the usual ornaments. Instead she is seen in a distinctive costume, wrapped in a pleated cloth. Her head is completely covered by fabric, wound around her forehead like a turban and looped under her chin; her face appears as if peeping out of the swathes of cloth. The elephant on which the figures would have been seated is now missing.

There is no way of knowing what is being narrated in this fragment. The scene may show a procession. However, an examination of more complete pieces, from both Chandraketugarh and elsewhere in India, show two main stories in which a group is seated on an elephant (with minor variations in each type). In pieces where the third figure holds a pot, it has been interpreted as the scene of the dispersal of the relics of the Buddha after his cremation,[1] a familiar theme in contemporary stone imagery. In some of the terracotta examples from the Upper Ganga Valley, one of the riders is seen dropping coins behind him. This has been interpreted as a scene showing the narrative of Udayana-Vasavadatta.[2]

1 This can be seen on a piece from Hadipur, Chandraketugarh, in the collection of the State Archaeological Museum of West Bengal, Calcutta, illus. in Ahuja 2001, *op. cit.*, fig. 3.239. Other notable plaques that show figures riding an elephant include two fragments from Tamluk, one from a relatively secure excavated context in the collection of the ASI, Delhi, and the other at the Tamluk Museum: see Ahuja 2001, *op. cit.*, figs. 3.240 and 3.241 respectively. The image of figures riding an elephant from this period can also be found in other media, for example the two roughly contemporary silver roundels in the collection of the British Museum (nos. OA 1937.3–19.5 and 1937.3–19.6): see Errington and Cribb 1992, *op. cit.*, pp. 160–1. At times the figures can be under a royal *chhatra*, or they may be attended by a *chauri* bearer or a figure carrying a relic casket, which Czuma has suggested shows the division of the Buddha's relics: see S. Czuma and R. Morris, *Kushan Sculpture: Images from Early India*, Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1985, p. 155.

2 Udayana, the king of Kaushambi, eloped with Vasavadatta, the princess of Ujjaini, on the back of the cow elephant Bhadravati. The story is preserved in several texts, such as the Pali *Udenavattu*, the Sanskrit *Makandikavadana*, *Meghaduta*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Svapna-Vasavdatta*, *Pratijna-Yaugandharayana*, *Ratnavali*, *Priyadarsika* and the *Brahma-khanda* of the *Skanda Purana*. It finds mention also in the Jain *Vividha Tirtha Kalpa*, *Lalitavistara* and Tibetan-Buddhist literature. See the list in G. R. Sharma, 'Excavations at Kausambi, 1949–50', Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, Manager of Publications, 1969, p. 7. The attribution of the scene on the plaques as Udayana-Vasavdatta may have been first suggested by R. Krishnadasa, 'A Vasavdatta Udayana Terracotta', *JUPHS*, XVIII, 1945, pls. 1–2, pp. 82–90; see also S. C. Kala, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980, pp. 58–9. For a summary of the Udayana narrative see V. Mani, *Puranic Encyclopedia*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996 (reprint), pp. 801–3.

144 Dancing woman

*c.*First century AD
Probably Chandraketugarh, Bengal
Moulded terracotta plaque
H. 12.5 cm
EA1999.47

A dancer, with her hair dressed in open braids, is poised with a sensuous, gentle flexion in her body. The movement in the figure is accentuated by the swaying bejewelled chains suspended from her girdle. Their weight pulls on the girdle, exposing more of her belly. No attempt has been made to compensate for the figure's nudity by imposing excessive amounts of jewellery on it, as was generally the case in pre-Kushan images. In fact, the rhythm achieved by exposing large sections of smooth flesh and a few simple ornaments rather anticipates the Kushan idiom.

The dancer also wears a short necklace with a large central bead and six simple bracelets on each arm. The prominent tubular earring suspended from one ear is a common convention in terracottas from this period. Two small suspension holes are present on either side of her waist. The hair-style, iconography and spirit of the piece may be compared with contemporaneous examples from Dig (near Mathura) and another from Kaushambi.[1]

1 Mathura Government Museum (no. 59.4748), illus. in A. G. Poster, *From Indian Earth: 4000 Years of Terracotta Art*, exhib. cat., Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1986, no. 20, p. 98; the Kaushambi piece is in the Bharat Kala Bhavan (no. 22178), illus. in M. Chandra, 'Terracottas in the Bharat Kala Bhavan', A. Krishna, ed., *Chhavi 1, Golden Jubilee Volume*, Varanasi: Bharat Kala Bhavan, 1971, fig. 19.

145 Female bust

*c.*First century BC–first century AD
Eastern India, probably Chandraketugarh
Stained ivory
H. 6.5 cm
EAI996.64

Carved in the round, this rare and elegant bust shows a woman with a large, conical, beehive-shaped hat (or possibly a very elaborate coiffure), composed of rows of medallions that end in a thick band or scarf. The reverse shows her hair falling in a ponytail from the top of the hat. She has a smiling oval face framed by simple disc earrings, and a square pendant with scooped edges is suspended from her short plain necklace. Her right arm is completely missing and the left broken above the elbow. Several fissures can be seen along the side of the piece.

With its refined and self-confident grace, this piece is among a group of extremely fine ivory statuettes that have come to light from Bengal. Indian ivory carving was highly valued in antiquity and traded internationally. Several ivories of an Indian style have been found at Begram in Afghanistan. Another, buried in Pompeii, is executed in an earlier, post-Mauryan style, consistent with the period before AD 79, when an eruption of Vesuvius destroyed the city.

Some of the best examples have emerged in recent years from Bengal, mostly from the Chandraketugarh area. They are usually stained in a dark brown colour. While some of them are utilitarian (used as handles or a decorative terminal to a furniture leg), others, such as this piece, are decorative. A number of graceful, freestanding ivory and clay statuettes have come to light which do not appear to bear any religious iconographic attributes. Judging by the nature of Indian poetic literature and drama from the ancient period, there is good reason to believe that art was used for decorative ends as well as religious purposes.

146 *Mithuna* or loving couple

First century BC–first century AD
Eastern India, probably Tamluk
Terracotta
H. 5.8 cm
EAI993.389

PUBLISHED: J. K. Bautze, *Early Indian Terracottas*, Leiden: Brill, 1995, pl. XXXI(d)

This pale buff to cream-coloured fragment from a moulded terracotta plaque shows a *mithuna* or amorous couple. The female has her left arm around her partner's shoulder. As the male, positioned behind his partner and to her left, reaches towards her face with his left hand, his loose bracelet of beads slips down his forearm, while she turns her bashful glance away from him. The composition captures the contradictory feelings of shyness and the closeness of the couple's embrace. This rare terracotta fragment shows a quality of empathy, movement and compositional sophistication matched by only the finest pieces of the period.

Typically, the male figure's turban is arranged into an oval element on one side of his head. The female's hair is elaborately dressed, its rectangular arrangement over the forehead being a common style of the first century BC, widely seen in terracotta plaques. So too are her multiple necklaces and the markings of the *bindu* or *tika*, enclosed in an eye-shaped outline on her forehead.

Although *mithuna* imagery is commonly found in Bengal, particularly in the villages of the site of Chandraketugarh, they are generally formulaic in composition (see for instance Cat. 147). However, a small corpus of fragments from Tamluk, largely in the collection of the site museum, show, as does this piece, considerable charm and the conscious projection of mood and individuality.[1] The piece is coated in a creamy slip, possibly kaolin, which on account of a low firing temperature has not fully adhered to the body of the plaque – a tendency to which many Chandraketugarh and Tamluk plaques were prone.

Vatsyayana, the late Kushan period (*c.* third–fourth centuries AD) author of the *Kamasutra*, acknowledged that he was producing a compendium of known sources in the field of *kama* (erotics). Erotic metaphors, and eroticism itself, abound in the surviving plays and poetry from an earlier period – such as the writings of the playwright Ashvaghosha and the Satvahana poet Hala, and in some early Buddhist Jatakas, as well as the *Natyashastra*, the major text on aesthetics dateable to the second century BC. These foundations of eroticism in literature are echoed in the art of the same period, as this small plaque demonstrates.

Dozens of small, moulded terracotta plaques of *mithunas* have been found all over South Asia, from as far west as Taxila and widely in the Gangetic plains at Mathura, Ahichhatra and Kaushambi. The most lyrical of the early depictions, however, come from Bengal. The erotic imagery such plaques contain performs a wide range of symbolic functions. As a (mimetic) substitute for a magico-religious fertility ritual, it may have warded off foetus-stealing demons, while it also was a symbolic metaphor connecting one architectural structure with another. The images were said to help the buildings on which they were placed endure the electrical shock of lightning; elsewhere, they became tools by which one community could poke fun at another on a temple wall. Some small early terracottas and ivories appear to represent secular dramas. However, the most widespread occurrence of the *mithuna* in early Indian art was as an auspicious symbol placed on the gateways of contemporaneous Buddhist religious shrines, where it served as a powerful talisman. This can best be seen on the entrances of the rock-cut caves at Karle and Kondane in Maharashtra and Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh, as well as at Bodh Gaya in Bihar.

1 An unpublished *mithuna* plaque in the Tamluk site museum, for instance, captures a couple kissing in an enclosed courtyard: Ahuja 2001, *op. cit.*, fig. 3.254.

147 *Maithuna* scene

*c.*Second–first centuries BC
Probably Chandraketugarh, Bengal
Ivory
H. 4.1, W. 3.7 cm max.
EA1998.39
Gift of Alexander Götz

PUBLISHED: A. Topsfield, 'Ivory plaque', *Archaeometry*, 41, 1, 1999, p. 203.

The medallion, a carved plaque of irregular oval form, shows a *maithuna* scene (a loving couple engaged in sexual activity). Its iconography is typical and widely found at Chandraketugarh in this period.[1] The woman is shown on her back on a deep chair with her legs splayed, the right one held back by her arm, the left one over the shoulder of her partner, who is shown standing. Radiating lines incised on her breasts are most unusual and are perhaps meant to indicate their volume.

The naked figures wear their hair within turbans typical of the period. This is accompanied by the usual items of jewellery, including indifferently incised discoid earrings, armbands and bracelets and short necklaces that are nearly identical on both the man and woman. A broad girdle and anklets are additionally worn by the female. As is the norm for *maithuna* images from Bengal, a vessel, in this case a large water pot, is placed under their bed or chair. The bottom right edge of the piece is broken, leaving the male without his feet.

The composition of the piece is deliberately explicit, the angle chosen to exhibit fully the sexual intimacy between the couple. It is noteworthy that both the figures are smiling, which, along with the overt pose, bespeaks the quality of confident enjoyment, or *bhoga*. It is a celebratory representation, rather than being associated with any coyness, seduction or hint of shame.

It may also be noted that while *mithunas* (loving, amorous couples) are found in stone at chaityas and stupa sites, *maithuna* depictions are not. *Maithuna*, as noted above, is the iconographic term for scenes which show coition, cunnilingus or fellatio. They are more popular in Lower Bengal (particularly in the Chandraketugarh area) than in any other region, although a few have also been found at Tamluk and Kaushambi. The terracotta examples are part of the general fabric of post-Mauryan archaeological assemblages at sites in the lower Ganga Valley. This ivory piece has been Carbon 14-tested and found to be consistent with those dates.[2]

Importantly, *maithunas* are only found in the 'minor' arts of terracotta and ivory at this date. They are usually of a small size (approximately 5–8 cm in diameter or height and seldom more than 10 cm in length), and even more rarely drilled with suspension holes. Their function remains mysterious. In Bengal *mithuna* and *maithuna* scenes are found with unparalleled frequency and exhibit great variety. Some within the genre, such as this piece, are both compositionally and iconographically consistent and are commonly represented, giving credence to the idea that they are merely 'secular' representations. The mo detailed and plausible explanation for th has been given by Devangana Desai, wh feels they may show the transmutation i visual media of fertility rituals.[3] Moving from a 'ritual' interpretation for these im becomes more difficult when we context alise the erotic plaques within the broad concerns of contemporaneous religious imagery, which is substantially connecte with begetting and protecting children.

1 See Bautze 1995, *op. cit.*, pls. XXXI(d), XXXII(a)

2 The plaque was tested by the Oxford Universit Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit at the Research Laboratory for Archaeology (report of 7.7.98), yielding a date range of 380–180 BC (with 95.4 pe confidence). This is close enough to the expected of the object to be reassuring as to the contempo of the carving itself with the material.

3 See D. Desai, *The Erotic Sculpture of India: A Soci Cultural Study*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manohar 1975, pp. 14–18, and Poster 1986, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–6.

148 Tile with lion

Probably sixth century AD
Found at Dimapur, Assam
Terracotta
H. 15, W. 14.3 cm
EA1952.81
Gift of Mr N. S. Mundy

This nearly square tile is carved in high relief. It shows a prancing lion with one foreleg raised, reaching out to what could be a figure, while flames or foliage issue from its mouth. Three large flaming elements are placed on its neck. A hole has been drilled in the centre of the tile under the lion's belly. The piece is worn and a corner is damaged.

Although several sites in Kashmir and Central Asia have produced carved, stamped and incised terracotta tiles, not all these sites are well documented. Nor have they been scientifically excavated; some have even been pillaged to the point where little trace of them remains. It is difficult to relate this tile to those from Harwan (cat. 61.1–4), the only well documented site in the region, where the tiles are stamped and the clay well levigated. None of the carved bricks or tiles found in the Kushan and Gupta periods in Northern India or Kashmir have the type of micaceous inclusions visible in this piece. In addition, the style of the lion, with the flames (possibly conch shells) on his neck, anticipates later Nepalese or Tibetan ornament. This tile was reportedly found at Dimapur, Assam, a region with an important and ancient history of terracotta temples which have largely been destroyed.

6

MISCELLANEA

< Detail of Cat. 152

149 Ropes of stone beads

Various semi-precious stones
All Proto- or Early Historic
Various locations, mostly in North India
EATNIS.795
Given by J. H. Rivett-Carnac

The skill of Indian lapidaries in bead-making has been remarked upon by archaeologists and scholars of jewellery, who have shown that beads may be studied to provide information on various aspects of society. As well as being clear signifiers of wealth and status, they are also often shaped into distinct talismans, or are desired because individual stones have a prophylactic quality, thus lending insight into wider superstition and social mores. Beads are also studied by archaeologists for their importance in revealing trade networks or routes of exchange in antiquity.[1]

As most of these beads were collected without adequate contextual information, we are not able to determine their archaeological importance with any certainty. They bear some old labels that state they came from areas such as Rai Bareilly, Allahabad, Gorakhpur, Ranchi and other places in Northern, Eastern and Central India in the late nineteenth century. Many are of rock crystal, carnelian or banded agate. They come from the collection of the avid antiquarian and discoverer of Indian prehistory John Henry Rivett-Carnac, whose reconnaissance tours led him widely through these regions.

1 A comprehensive study of workshops that make similar carnelian beads, led by Mark Kenoyer, yielded relevant information on how we perceive it was done even at Chanhudaro, *c.*2000 BC: Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, Massimo Vidale, Kuldip S. Bhan, 'Carnelian Bead Production in Khambat, India: An Ethnoarchaeological Study', in Bridget Allchin, ed., *Living Traditions: Studies in Ethnoarchaeology of South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press and IBH, 1994. Gurcharan S. Khanna's study of chalcedony in Bagor, Rajasthan, which travelled there from the Deccan Trap over 90 km away, for instance, shows the patterns of movement and exchange as early as the Mesolithic age: G. S. Khanna, 'Patterns of Mobility in the Mesolithic of Rajasthan', *Man and Environment* 18, 1, pp. 49–55.

150 Ewer with elephant trunk-shaped spout

First–second centuries AD
Northwest Frontier region, Pakistan; found in South Vietnam, site unknown
Bronze with high copper content, with a reportedly thick, aerated patina
H. 31.8, W. 33 cm max.
EA2000.116
Gift of Alexander Götz

This ewer was reportedly found in South Vietnam, although its closest stylistic parallels come from Gandhara. A comparable example in the Cleveland Museum of Art[1] is a more globular ewer; it has a small foot and curving elephant trunk for the spout, in contrast to this one which is straight, but shares a similar trumpet-shaped neck and moulding at the neck. Writing about the Cleveland example, Czuma drew attention to excavated pieces from Taxila and to Hellenistic ewers.[2]

The body of the ewer has a pronounced ovoid form, with a floral band around the centre. The elongated, trumpet-shaped neck has a plain moulding in the centre; it is surmounted over the lip by a looped handle, patterned like a garland and terminating in crudely fashioned lions. The ewer sits on a tall conical foot, the edge of which is fashioned into a perforated pattern of a series of elephant heads with raised trunks, echoing the spout. The spout itself is square in cross-section – another feature that this ewer shares with others from the Northwest Frontier. Most of the spout is now restored, to match closely photographs taken when it was intact, and there has been minor restoration to the elephant head.

Spherical or squat ovoid pots with long spouts and a curving handle over the rim are a standard ancient Indian design of metalware. They are known to us from several relief carvings ranging from Bharhut, in the second century BC, to Gandhara and Amaravati, up to the third century AD.[3]

In the Kushan period trade with Southeast Asia from ports in Bengal, and the contemporaneous Satavahana trade from the coast of Andhra, are both well attested in historical and archaeological records. In his multi-volume work on the archaeology of the Mekong Delta, Malleret draws attention to various Kushan coins that were found there.[4]

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1 S. Czuma, *Kushan sculpture: Images from Early India*, Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1985, no. 86, pp. 171–2. Compare also a similar ewer in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 2004.59, which is described as 'Vietnam, late 2nd–3rd century AD'.

2 M. Comstock and C. Vermeule, *Greek, Etruscan and Roman Bronzes in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1971, nos. 446, 448, 449, 480; Marshall found similar ones at Taxila, dateable to the first century AD: J. Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations 1913–14*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951, vol. III, pl. 174, nos. 259–60, and vol. II, p. 589. Smaller gold spouts in the form of elephants' heads, originally attached to a glass vessel, were found among the treasures of Begram and are in the Kabul Museum: see B. Rowland and M. Rice, *Art of Afghanistan, Objects from the Kabul Museum*, London: Penguin, 1971, pl. 79, and J. Hackin, *Nouvelles recherches archéologiques à Begram*, Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan, XI, 2 parts, Paris, 1954, fig. 240. Compare also Kushan bronze ewers with elephant spouts (and mahouts in some cases) in the Matsudo Museum: see M. S. Hakubutsukan, *Silk Road and Gandhara: The Fifth Anniversary of Matsudo Museum: Special exhibition*, Chiba-ken Matsudo-shi: Matsudo Shiritsu Hakubutsukan, 1997, no. 32, which has a large elephant head spout, also no. 33(i–iii) for similar spout fragments.

3 Ewers with looped handles occur more than once at Bharhut, perhaps most prominently in the famous relief showing the purchase of Jetavana: see B. Barua, *Barhut*, Book III: *Aspects of Life and Art*, Calcutta: Indian Research Institute, (Fine Arts Series; nos. 1–3, 1934–1937), 1937, pl. XCI, no. 140; A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'La Sculpture de Bharhut', *Annals du Musée Guimet, Bibliothèque d'Art*, n.s., 6, Paris: Vanoset, 1956, pl. XXVI, fig. 67. For Amaravati, see R. Knox, *Amaravati, Buddhist Sculpture from the Great Stupa*, London: British Museum, 1992, fig. 42, p. 102. For Gandharan stone reliefs, see the scenes of Amrapali approaching the Buddha with such a vessel in I. Kurita, *Gandharan Art I*, Tokyo: Nigensha Publishing Company, 1993, pp. 230–2, nos. 477–80.

4 L. Malleret, *L'archéologie du Delta du Mékong*, Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, I–IV, 1959–63.

151 Sealing

Date unknown
Taxila
Terracotta
L. 13.2, H. 8.5 cm max.
EA1958.20
Gift of E. M. Scratton

The impression is deeper in the centre of this curious clay plaque, suggesting that perhaps it was made by impressing a cylinder seal, with the greatest force being applied while over the centre of the plaque. Although that appears to be how it was made, one cannot be sure however: no cylinder seal with this type of pattern is yet known from anywhere in the world and moreover, unless the person impressing the seal was particularly careful, we would expect to see some trace of a repetition on one of the edges, whereas none in fact exists. The impression is in no readable script and does not even appear to be in straight lines, horizontally or vertically. And yet, like a pseudo-script, it has the semblance of some ancient Brahmi characters and symbols which may tantalise the curiosity of numismatists and epigraphists. On its extremities are symbols that may be taken to be the sun and moon (the latter looking more like an anemone). A suggestion made on an unsigned note found alongside the object in the museum's reserves says that this plaque may be an early instance of cartography, or a symbolic map. It is difficult to see how, without information on what each symbol refers to. The only recognisable motif on the object is a dagger with a serpentine blade. We have little substantiated history of such blades in India. In most museums nowadays they are associated with Indonesian kris, prompting speculations that they may have been made in ancient India as well.

We should also remember that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inventive forgeries were being produced – not so much direct copies of known artefacts as innovative assimilations of ancient styles to produce maverick, and thus almost plausible, objects. Such forger's objects often bore inscriptions, as that was what nineteenth century antiquarians were looking for.[1]

1 The late 19th century forger Islam Akhun's infamous Brahmi manuscripts in Khotan deceived scholars across Europe and India and were extensively published by A. F. R. Hoernle before their exposure by Aurel Stein in 1901. Examples of these are in the Ashmolean collection. For further information on Islam Akhun, see http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/islam-akhun. An even greater scandal accompanied the alleged forging of Brahmi inscriptions on the relic caskets excavated from the stupa at Piprahwa of which the British Government made grand state gifts to its Buddhist subjects in Burma, Ceylon and Siam. Peppé, the excavator, was perhaps part of a wider nexus headed by Alois Führer, that falsified inscriptions and relics to ingratiate themselves to the British Indian Government; or else, used the forgeries to cover up the discovery of original relics at the risk of personal infamy. For a summary of the deceptions surrounding these, see: http://www.piprahwa.org.uk/The%20Piprahwa%20Deceptions.htm (accessed 29 December 2011), and Charles Allen, *The Buddha and Dr Führer: An Archaeological Scandal*, London: Haus Publishing, 2011.

152 Surya

c. Fifth to eighth centuries AD
North India: said to come from Sonkh, near Mathura
Probably grey schist or a variety of potstone (chlorite)
H. 14.4 cm
EA1998.212

This fragmentary rectangular plaque has an unusual depiction of Surya, the Indian solar deity, shown seated in a circular medallion and holding lotuses in both hands. The square frame is marked with cross-hatching and medallions in the form of partial flower heads. Above is a row of six (or possibly seven?) abstracted heads. The reverse is double-scored with repeating lozenge patterns. The Museum's records state that the piece was thought to date from the eleventh or twelfth century, and that it came from Sonkh in Mathura. However, this attribution can be questioned on several grounds.

So-called 'folk' styles of artefacts, sketchily drawn or carved, iconographically compelling but not distinctly attributable to a particular style or epoch, have always been difficult to categorise; they were, in fact, given a nomenclature of 'timeless' by the noted Indian art historian Stella Kramrisch. This Surya seemingly fits into this category. Yet Kramrisch's rationale is itself questionable. It runs the risk of essentialising the Indian village into some hermetically sealed timeless civilisation, impervious to a sense of history or change.

On close examination, many objects previously designated 'timeless' or 'folk' in their stylistic idiom are at times capable of being historicised. A similar attempt can be made here. A closely comparable piece that comes from the region around Sialkot in Punjab is now in the British Museum (BM no. 1977,1011.1). Called Surya in the Museum's records,[1] but more likely to be a Vishnu, the standing image is crowned, wears a *vanamala* garland and appears to hold a lotus and conch (which may be misread as another lotus, thus leading to the misattribution of Surya). He wears a short dhoti and *yajnopavita* (the sacred thread across the torso), and has two much denuded figures or personified attributes flanking him at the bottom of the plaque – perhaps a female figure (*gadadevi*?) at the bottom proper left of the main standing image and the outline of another figure whose surface has broken away (*chakrapurusha*?).[2]

The BM piece is carved in the same cursory style as the Ashmolean figure and has been assigned an eighth century date simply because it is thought of as a presumed debasement of the mature Gandhara style. However, objects of this 'style' are also found in Madhya Pradesh, in the foothills and temple towns in the Shivaliks, in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh,[3] and it is difficult to arrive at any secure dating system for them.

The composition of Surya in a tondo is an iconographic convention that derives from his symbolic association with the wheel or *chakra*, the circular shape of the sun, his single-wheeled chariot, etc.[4] The faces on top could refer to the days of the week, which refer in turn to the planets or *grahas* – not always shown as nine in number, as later became the norm in medieval times.

153 Two dogs or jackals

Date uncertain; probably after *c.*300 BC
Region uncertain
Terracotta
H. 6.3 and 7.6 cm
EA1966.42 and EA1966.43
Gift of the Church Missionary Society

These two pinch-modelled quadrupeds, perhaps depicting dogs, jackals or even hyenas, may be related to scores of others widely found across many archaeological sites. We do not know the context of this pair's discovery, but comparable examples are datable anywhere after *c.*300 BC, when this type of generally coarser red clay starts being widely noticed at sites as far apart as Arikamedu in Tamil Nadu and along the Ganga Valley in the north.[1]

1 Few exact parallels with dog – or jackal-shaped quadrupeds have been published. However, more generally such animals can be seen illustrated in G. R. Sharma, *Excavations at Kausambi 1949–50*, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*, no. 74, Delhi, 1969, pl. XLIV B.

1 Accessed online (28 July 2011) at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=246618&partid=1.

2 Personified attributes tend to decline after the sixth century AD, which may be a factor in dating the British Museum piece to around the sixth century.

3 Comparative images can be seen, for instance, in H. Härtel, 'Excavations at Sonkh: 2500 Years of a Town in Mathura District', with contributions by H.-J. Paech and R. Weber, in *Monographien zur Indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie*, vol. 9, Berlin, 1993, p. 257, fig. 2 (and further illus.), from level 12, i.e. found in strata dated between the seventh and thirteenth centuries AD (pp. 248f.). These have smooth backs, however, unlike this example.

4 See J. N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, 2nd ed., 1956, reprinted New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, pp. 432–45.

54 Animal-headed woman with baby

Possibly modern
Bengal or Assam
Grey unbaked clay
H. 12 cm approx.
EAX.190

This highly stylised, hand-modelled grey clay figure with applied and incised decoration represents a seated female figure. She has a bird-like head and pinched nose, wears a large feather that extends into plume or ponytail and holds a child at her breast. The ornamental detail, such as it is, is shown through a few quick strokes incised in the torso to create a necklace and armbands. Three lines are marked on the neck. The piece is partially hollow, with a perforation at its base to preserve it during firing, which, if it was done at all on this piece – as it still smells of wet clay – seems to have stopped well before vitrification. The image has lost its right arm, left leg and right foot.

Stylistically and iconographically, this figure is of some importance. An almost identical piece excavated at Tamluk, West Bengal[1] came from the earliest levels of anthropomorphic imagery discovered at the site. Its dark grey to black colour, stamped and appliqué jewellery and excavation context compare well with examples found in late Mauryan levels at sites in the Ganga Valley. Female figures with bird-like features, or at times with bird heads, are also found at other sites in the Early Historic period.[2] Collectively these pieces point to an important substratum of image-making in the Mauryan to post-Mauryan period which remains relatively less explored, in a period from which many more finely moulded terracotta plaques are known.[3]

However as this piece is not fired, or certainly not fired well enough, it is unlikely that it is an ancient piece from Bengal,[4] where the vicissitudes of the weather would not have permitted it to endure. In fact, this particular iconography of the stylised mother (with pinched nose and appliqué pellets) and child is a common form from Assam and Bengal.[5] Stella Kramrisch, who had a particular interest in the arts of village India, and in those classes of antiquities that

155 Conical element (*chillum*)

would at the time have been considered more for their anthropological interest than artistic merit,[6] made a distinction between 'timeless' and 'timed' terracottas in 1939,[7] describing the timeless ones as those forms and styles that remain broadly the same over hundreds, in some cases even thousands, of years. This iconographic form certainly lends credence to her interpretation.

Date uncertain
Mohenjodaro
Terracotta
H. 9.3 cm
EAMd.34
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

This conical element with a hole running through it is most likely a chillum or bowl for a water pipe. The gentle hollow or 'bowl' of the wider end of the chillum is stamped with circles containing dots. Diagonal lines are incised along the body of the exterior. There is no secure way of dating this object precisely. However, as it is recorded as coming from the environs of Mohenjodaro and is impressed with the motif of circles and dots, ubiquitous across the ancient world, one may tentatively suggest that it might be from the Historical period.

Dating objects such as this is challenging. It was found at Mohenjodaro, among the most ancient Protohistoric sites of South Asia, the excavated material from which is dated between 2500 and 1700 BC. Yet we do not know if this object was actually excavated. A surface find could be from any historical epoch: ancient, medieval or it could even be a recently discarded object from one of the neighbouring villages of Mohenjodaro. Water pipes, hookahs or hubble-bubbles are associated mostly with smoking tobacco, only introduced to India from the New World after AD 1600. Yet the medicinal ingestion of smoke from different herbs, roots and fragrant barks is no doubt an old custom. The form of the chillum, however, appears to be related more to a hookah than to the small portable chillums shown carried by sadhus in paintings of the Mughal period, and still widely used today.

Adding to the complexity are the small, circular motifs with a central dot or small concentric circles within it. This ancient symbol, famously found on late Neolithic figurines, has never stopped being employed on ivories and terracottas, or even as tattoo marks.

1 Now in the collection of the Archaeological Survey of India, housed at Purana Qila, New Delhi (acc. no. CAC 85.17/59): illus. in N. P. Ahuja, *Early Indian Moulded Terracotta, The Emergence of an Iconography and Variations in Style, c.*200 BC–AD 200, SOAS, University of London Ph.D. dissertation, 2001, vol. 2, fig. 3.186.

2 Compare here for instance, Cats. 29 and 50.

3 A few other pieces from Tamluk also show an admixture of the coarser animistic / zoomorphic types and the more refined and decorative moulded plaques, see Philadelphia Museum, no. 1994–148–294. Also for Tamluk, see T. N. Ramachandran, 'Tamralipti', *Artibus Asiae*, XVI, 1951, pl. I, fig. 1, pp. 228, 237; he compares it with the pieces from Pataliputra.

4 A thermoluminescence test by Oxford Authentication on this piece (sample no. N 105x89) confirmed that it had been fired to far too low a temperature to be able to obtain a TL reading. The piece could therefore be historical or modern.

5 S. K. Ray, *Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961, pts. I, II and III; and H. Shah, *Form and Many Forms of Mother Clay: Contemporary Indian pottery and terracotta, Exhibition and catalogue*, New Delhi: National Crafts Museum, Delhi, Office of the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts, Govt. of India, 1985, pp. 52, 94, 123–4, 126, 191, 198.

6 See the introductory notes by B. S. Miller, *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Collected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983; also S. Kramrisch, *Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, exhib. cat., Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1968.

7 Kramrisch, S., *Indian Sculpture*, London: Oxford University Press and YMCA, 1933: pp 89–110.

156 Lamps on stands

Date uncertain
Mohenjodaro
Terracotta
Gift of Lady Harrison, 1952

156.1 TALLER LAMP
H. 11 cm
EAMd.32

156.2 SMALLER LAMP
H. 9.7 cm
EAMd.33

Both these lamps, reportedly found at Mohenjodaro, are of a common type of oil lamp, used and disposed of for millennia. These are shaped to hold four cotton wicks to be lit simultaneously. No such lamps have been excavated at any Indus Valley sites and it is unlikely that they are as early as that. However, traces of artefacts from many periods have been found at these sites, and it is possible that these common lamps could well be ancient Indian.

Oil lamps such as these are made even now and markets fill with stalls selling them for the festival of Diwali. However, the tradition of placing them on stands with an upturned rim to collect the dripping oil from the lamp is a design found only in South Indian brass lamps.

157 Four sealings of Indus Valley style

Modern
North India
Terracotta
Given by Rev. Cuthbert King

157.1
H. 3.2, L. 6.6 cm
EA1974.2

157.2
H. 1.8, L. 4.5 cm
EA1974.3

157.3
H. 1.6, L. 4.8 cm
EA1974.4

157.4
L. 4.1 cm
EA1974.5

These four sealings, reportedly found at Harappa, are inscribed with a pseudo-Harappan 'script'. While genuine Harappan sealings are usually impressed, these are clearly incised. Some characters are recognisable, such as the chalice, or *theta*-like circle cut by a diagonal, the vertical bars and the famous Harappan symbol of the fish, yet none of them appear to be authentic. Fish in Harappan seals invariably have an additional pair of dorsal fins, and sealings are seldom so neatly fashioned into perfectly cut pieces. A thermoluminescence test has confirmed that these pieces are modern.[1]

1 Test Report by Oxford Authentication, sample no. N105x88, collected from Museum no. EA1974.2. The piece was found to have been last fired less than 150 years ago.

158 Male head

Modern copy
From an unidentified site in Pakistan
Terracotta
H. 11 cm
EA1966.21
Gift of Douglas Barrett

This head was first acquired in Sindh in the 1920s. It is a modern copy of a Gupta period, Gandhara style stucco or terracotta, of a type highly collectable at the time. The exaggerated naturalism, stylised curling hair and furrowed brow follow the aesthetic of original Gandhara heads; however, the broad nose, fleshy face and thick lips are in a more Gupta style. Not only is the manner of this hybridity incongruous, but the bright orange terracotta colour is also unrecorded from ancient pieces. A thermoluminescence test has confirmed that the piece is modern.[1]

1 Tested by Oxford Authentication, August 2005, sample no. N105x87. The object was found to have been fired less than 150 years ago.

159 Plaque with female attendant

Modern impression
North India
Terracotta
H. 8.3 cm
EA1960.86
Presented by the executors of Sir C. Leonard Woolley

This moulded plaque showing a female *chauri*-bearer and other figures is an impression of a fragmentary mould now in the collection of the Allahabad Museum.[1] The original mould is certainly of the late Kushan to Gupta period and is an unusual artefact, for the art of such finely moulded plaques is generally thought to have disappeared by the Kushan period. The slender *chauri*-bearer may in fact be a part of a larger narrative, judging by the composition and iconography.

A close inspection of the Ashmolean's plaque raised suspicion, initially because the edges of the plaque are all uniformly raised, whereas being a fragment (and not a real edge) they should be absolutely along the same plane as the plaque itself. The texture of the terracotta was also too smooth, and not consistent with that of any known terracottas from ancient India. Further investigation has revealed the mould from which it was impressed in the Allahabad Museum. As is to be expected, the mould is only fractionally larger than this impression, as the latter would have shrunk, first when drying and then further during the firing process. A thermoluminescence test has confirmed the piece is modern.[2] This impression was probably made before the mould came into the Allahabad Museum's collection.

1 Allahabad Museum no. 3457, illus. in S. C. Kala,, *Terracottas in the Allahabad Museum*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1980, fig. 324. Although Kala prefers to date it to the first century AD, the object may in fact be of more recent date.

2 Test conducted by Oxford Authentication, sample no. N105x95. The piece was found to have been last fired less than 150 years ago.

160 Votive stupas (*tsa-tsa*) or pot dabbers

Fourth–sixth centuries AD
Northwest Frontier
Unbaked clay
H. 8.9 and 7 cm
EA1984.28 and EA1984.29
Gift of Mrs Alethea Pitt

These objects were reportedly collected by the donor's father, Sir Armine Dew, in the Northwest Frontier Province in the 1930s. In form they appear to be either pot dabbers or small votive stupas.

Unbaked clay dabbers with a rounded edge are used across South Asia to pad out the rounded or hemispherical bottom of the classic Indian earthen pot. However, these two were found in Gandhara – a region known for its widespread Buddhist culture which, at least for ordinary people, unlike monks who may have been able to command more substantial donations, would have involved festive ritual offerings in unbaked clay and other ephemeral media. These objects could well be votive stupas, of the sort recorded both in the arid parts of Central Asia and the Himalayas. The upper sloping part of these stupas bear repeated impressions of images of the Buddha, now heavily denuded, lending credence to this view.

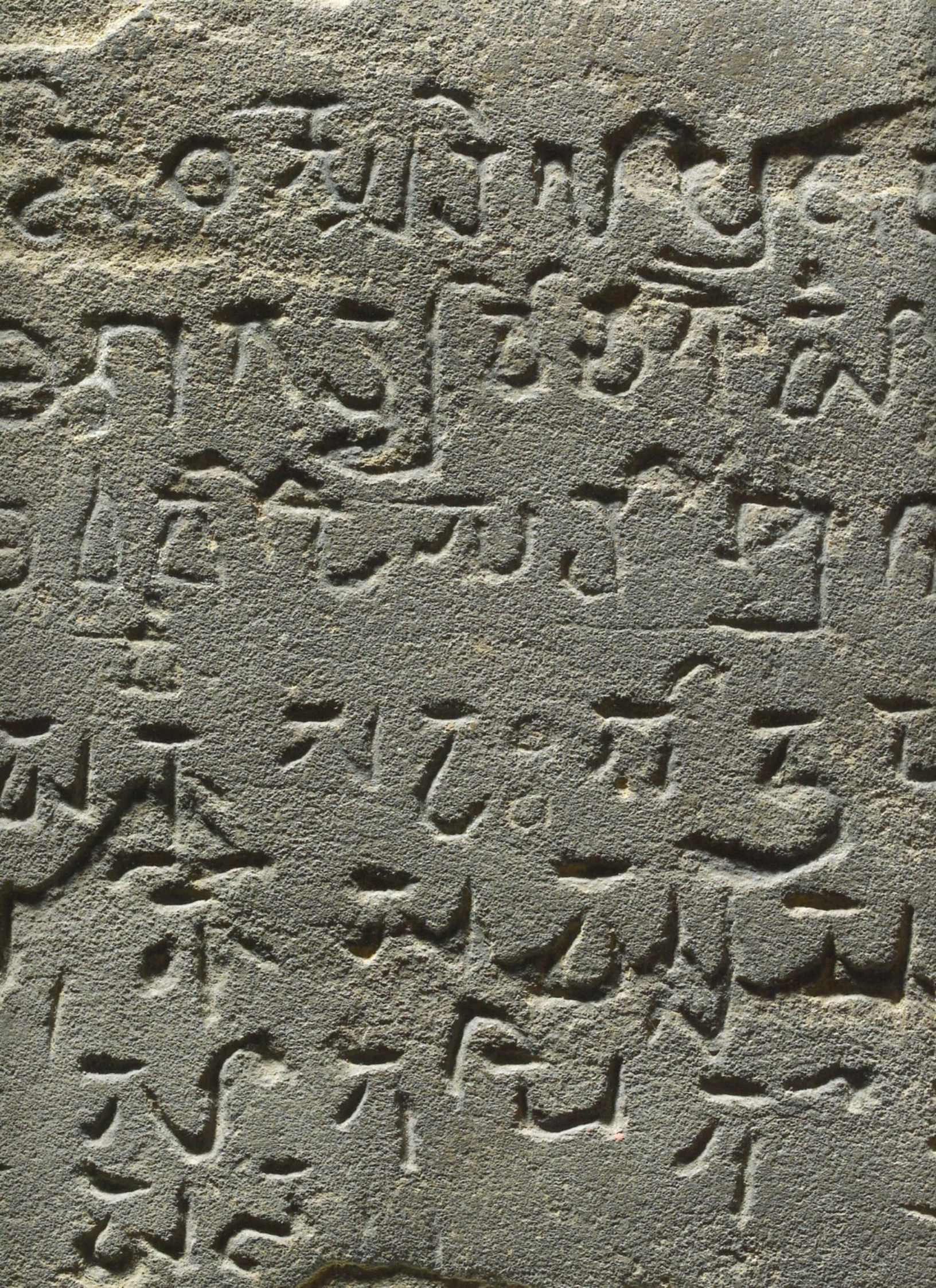
In Tibetan Buddhist practice, offerings of such stupas and of other Buddhist images are called *tsa-tsa*. *Tsa-tsa* offerings are made on all kinds of occasions: to remember ancestors, when embarking on a difficult journey or more generally, as a votive offering to invoke auspiciousness.

161 Fifteen potsherds

Third century BC–sixth century AD
Sarnath
EAX.2039
Gift of W. Howe Greene, *c.*1925

Sarnath, where the Buddha preached his first sermon, has been a satellite city, in the nature of a monastic establishment, just north of Varanasi for some 2,500 years. One of the four most holy places in the Buddhist world, it is rich with archaeological remains, dating from the third century BC to the twelfth century AD. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the site was subject to extensive despoliation. Several excavations have taken place, some more systematic than others.[1] These excavations have revealed spectacular statuary, which overshadowed scholarly attention to the huge numbers of terracotta vessels and small finds from the region, including storage jars, censers, bowls, cooking pots, lamps, etc. These sherds come from such a typical assemblage, and are variously dateable from the third century BC to the fifth or sixth centuries AD.

1 In 1794 the emperor Ashoka's Dharmarajika Stupa was infamously pillaged for its bricks to build the Ramnagar palace as well as other local buildings. In 1835–6, Alexander Cunningham excavated two stupas, a temple and a monastery there. His left-over proceeds, some 60 cartloads, were thrown into the river Varuna to serve as a breakwater to facilitate construction of the piers of a bridge. Nonetheless archaeological reports on the site include *ASI–AR*, vol. 1, pp. 103, 121; vol. 8, p.16; vol. 11, p. 181; also *ASI–AR* 1904–5, p. 59; 1906–7, p. 68; 1907–8, p. 43; 1914–15, p. 97; 1919–20, p. 26; 1921–2, p. 42.



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